JESUS CHRIST AND AL-IMAM AL-MAHDI

IN THE MILLENNIAL ESCHATOLOGY OF CHRISTIANITY AND SHĪ'AH ISLAM

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by

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APPROVAL SHEET

JESUS CHRIST AND AL-IMAM AL-MAHDI
IN THE MILLENNIAL ESCHATOLOGY OF CHRISTIANITY AND SHĪ'AH ISLAM

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To Lena,

My wife and prayer partner

and to

Michelle, Maureen, Marianne, Miracle, and Micah

my precious children

ABSTRACT

JESUS CHRIST AND AL-IMAM AL-MAHDI
IN THE MILLENNIAL ESCHATOLOGY OF CHRISTIANITY AND SHĪ'AH ISLAM

This dissertation argues that the Shī'ah doctrine of a subordinate role of Jesus Christ to the Mahdi in the eschaton cannot be substantiated because of the apparent contradiction between the Shī'ah *hadīth* and the Qur'ān pertaining to the return of the Mahdi. The examination of premillennial theology as derived from the NT teaching and the writings of the church fathers has demonstrated the consistencies of the doctrine of the *parousia* in biblical eschatology. This consistencies is absent when evaluating the Shī'ah theology on the return of the Mahdi as originated in the *hadīth* and the writings of modern Shī'ah scholars.

Chapter 1 introduces the significance of the topic of the Mahdi and return of Christ in Shī'ah and Christianity, presents the thesis, and proposes the methodology by which the thesis will be accomplished.

Chapter 2 establishes an understanding of the doctrine of the Mahdi by presenting the early Islamic history, particularly the encounter of Muhammad and Christian's heretical groups, history of Sunni–Shī'ah conflict, and the formulation of Shī'ah eschatology.

Chapter 3 surveys the teaching of the return of Christ in biblical eschatology. It traces the prophecy of His incarnation in the Old Testament and the teaching of the *parousia* in the New Testament. Selected writings of the church fathers and premillennial theologians pertaining to this topic are presented.

Chapter 4 compares several aspects in the expectation of the Mahdi's return and the *parousia* of Christ from prophecy, His birth, and His expected return. It also parallels the concept of the imāmate and the priesthood of Jesus, evaluating the sinlessness of Christ and the *ma'sum* of the Mahdi, while contrasting the ascension of Christ and the occultation of the Mahdi.

Chapter 5 summarizes the comparison presented in the previous chapter and suggestions for possible further research.

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PREFACE

The interest in studying Islamic eschatology developed in three stages of my ministry. The first stage began in August of 2005 during my mission trip to one of the areas that was severely devastated by the tsunami in December 2004, Nangroe Aceh Darussalam. During one of our visits, we met a young lady who, at that time, was in the seventh semester of *Institut Agama Islam Negeri Aceh* (State Islamic Institute of Aceh). She explained to us that there has been a discussion in her university about the return of Jesus Christ at the end of the world. They believe that Jesus would return again, but they were not assured of his role. We did not engage in the discussion for two reasons: the nature of our mission trip and the sensitivity of Aceh Province, and because I was not ready for such discussion.

The second stage happened during my regular visit to the Istiqlal Mosque in Jakarta –the largest mosque in Southeast Asia. The mosque provides seven gates through which the worshippers can enter; they represent the seven levels of heaven in Islamic theology. Since one of the gates is called *Al-Quddus*, which means *The Holy*, I asked the tour guide why it is called *The Holy*. He astounded me when he replied by explaining that this will be the gate *Isa Al-masih* (Jesus Christ) will enter heaven because he is the Holy One.

The interest increased as I began this doctoral program and read *The Last Trumpet* by Dr. Samuel Shahid. Dr. Tony Maalouf suggested that I pick my dissertation's topic from Shahid's book. As I formulated my thoughts and read Chapter 6 of this book, I heard the name Joel Rosenberg and his book, *The Twelfth Imam,* mentioned by Rush

Limbaugh in his talk show program. As I read the book and began my research, I became more convinced that the comparison between Jesus Christ and the Mahdi would be the topic of my dissertation.

Numerous people have accompanied me throughout the journey of this difficult program. Mark and Carmen Howell were the first ones to make this happen when they introduced me to Dr. Paige and Mrs. Dorothy Patterson. I will be forever grateful for the Pattersons' investment and sincere love they put into my family life. I am indebted to Dr. Malcom B. Yarnell, Dr. Jason Duesing, Dr. Samuel Shahid, Dr. Tony and Mrs. Lamis Maalouf, Dr. Gerardo Alfaro, Dr. Terry Wilder, Dr. Dean Sieberhagen, Dr. Craig Blaising, and Dr. John Massey – my professors at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary for their patience in training me. Dwight David, Stuart Sheehan, and, later on, Steve Bezner from Houston Northwest Baptist Church played another significant role in helping me get through this study. I cannot thank Hoyt and Kim Lovelace (Global Church Planting Partners) enough for their prayer and support by reading my papers and dissertation. Kyle and Leigh Cromwell have blessed me with their faithful prayers for my family. This journey would not be possible if not for the friendship and support we have with Robert and Rachel Browder, Dr. Michael Dean of Travis Avenue Baptist Church, and the guidance of Dr. Jack and Mrs. Barbara Terry.

I also would like to thank the beloved people of Living Stones Fellowship Church, who have cheered me up and prayed for me throughout the journey in this program. They allowed their pastor to take two sabbatical leaves in order to finish this dissertation. I would not have enough space to list all the names of prayer supporters who have been faithfully praying for me, but just to name a few: the family of Jakarta Baptist Theological Seminary, Kirby Woods Baptist Church, Dr. Michael Spradlin, Michael and

Ramona Fredman, Tom and Debby Kader, Christian and Anne Kartwijaya, Ninnie Winata, and many others. I am so grateful for the privilege to have interview Joel Rosenberg, David Cook, and David Pinault.

Writing a dissertation is an arduous task for a non-native English speaking person such as myself, and I would like to thank my proof-readers who have carefully read and given insight: Michael Metts, Cecil Price, Hoyt Lovelace, and Lyndsey Huckabee. I remember the prayers of my siblings and their family in Jakarta: Ketty, Lucky, Arry, and Billy. I know our parents are smiling in heaven now. Last but not least, Lena and our five precious children: Michelle, Maureen, Marianne, Miracle, and Micah. Thank you for sacrificing so much for your Dad and supporting him through this journey. My prayer is that this research will benefit not only the churches in America, but also the Union of Indonesian Baptist Churches. *Maranatha!*

John Henry Losreny Serworwora
Fort Worth, Texas
May 2019

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BSac	*Bibliotheca Sacra*
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
CCCIT	*Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*
EBC	The Expositor's Bible Commentary
EDBT	Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology
EI	*Encyclopedia of Islam*
EI2	*Encyclopedia of Islam 2*
EIr	*Encyclopedia of Iranica*
DCC	Dictionary of Christian Church
DJG	Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels
DTIB	Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible
DPHL	Dictionary of Paul and His Letters
PNTC	The Pillar New Testament Commentary
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
TDNT	Theological Dictionary of the New Testament
TWOT	Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament
JES	*Journal of Ecumenical Studies*
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
SEI	*Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam*

GLOSSARY OF ARABIC TERMS

Ahl al-bayt	People of the house, another reference to the Shī'ah
Al-Mahdi	the one guided by God to the truth, proper name of the Twelfth Imām
Al-masīh ad-dajjāl	Anti-Christ
Ghaybah	disappearance, occultation
Ghulat	extremist
Iblis	Satan
Imām	Leader
Isa al-Masih	*Jesus the Christ*
'Isma	infallibility
Shī'ah Àlī	follower of Àlī
Shīi 'Ithnā-'Ashari	The Twelver Shī'ah
Ma'sum	sinlessness, infallible
Nubuwwa	prophecy
Nass	clear designation in succession process of the Prophethood
Sahih	truthful, reliable
Shirk	equating God to someone or something, an unpardonable sin in Islam
'Isma	the total knowledge of the meaning of the revelation and its prescriptions

Raj'a	the return to the present state of existence after death, before the Day of Resurrection.
Sūrah	Chapter in the Qur'ān
Qaim	the one who will arrise
Qiyāma	end times
Yawm al-qiyāma	the day of resurrection.
Zuhūr	appearance, emergence

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

The expectation of a coming messiah is an important belief among the three major monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. While Judaism bases its eschatological hope on the Hebrew Bible (*Tanakh*) and denies the role of Messiah to Jesus, Christianity holds that the Old Testament (OT) prophecies pertaining to the coming of Messiah actually refer to the incarnation and *parousia* of Jesus as reflected and taught in the New Testament (NT).[1] By contrast, Islam believes that *Isa al-Masih*, or Jesus Christ, will come again at the end of the world (*qiyāma*).[2] While Sūrah 3:55 clearly states an Islamic expectation of the return of Jesus, Muslims in general repudiate the idea that Jesus will come as their Messiah.[3]

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[1] *Parousia* is derived from the Greek word "παρουσια" which means "presence, coming, or arrival." The root word is "πάρειμι," which means "to be present." See, "parousia," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, eds., Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 859. In the context of New Testament eschatology this word is found in 1Thes 4:15.

[2] The term *qiyāma* appears no less than seventy times in the Qur'ān and always refers to *yawm al-qiyāma* or "the day of resurrection." *Encyclopedia of Islam 2 (EI2)*. See Sūrah 2:85; 2:113; 2:174; 3:77; 3:106; 3:161. This dissertation adopts the Library of Congress Romanization system of Arabic.

[3] "'Behold!' Allah said: 'O Jesus! I will take thee and raise thee to Myself and clear thee (of the falsehoods) of those who blaspheme; I will make those who follow thee superior to those who reject faith, to the Day of Resurrection: Then shall ye all return unto me, and I will judge between you of the matters wherein ye dispute.'" All the Qur'ānic verses in this dissertation use Yusuf Ali's translation unless otherwise indicated.

Further, within Islam, one of the most important Shī'ah teachings discussed worldwide is the return of al-Imām al-Mahdi from his occultation, a figure that has often been described as the Shī'ah messiah.[4] The Shī'ah, who have extensively disseminated this teaching, represent only 10 to 13 percent of the total Muslim global population.[5] Yet, due to prominent figures such as the Ayatollah Khomeini and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad who have advocated this eschatological doctrine, the topic has been widely discussed.[6] Iran's sixth president, Ahmadinejad, continued the teaching about this awaited one.[7] During his supposed political speech to the delegates of the 67th General Assembly of the

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[4] His birth name was Muhammad Al-Mahdi ibn Hasan ibn Àlī ibn Muhammad. Several titles were given to him: the *Imām,* or the "Period," and the Lord of the Age. See Abdulaziz Abdulhussein Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism: The Idea of the Mahdi in Twelver Shiism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1981), 39–108. Hereafter, al-Mahdi will be referred to as the Mahdi. Although the concept of messiah originated within Judaism and Christianity, numerous Islamic scholars freely use this term to refer to the Mahdi. At the end of this chapter, I will clarify the definitions of several terms employed in this study. Occultation (*ghaybah*), one of the doctrines of Shī'ah appeared in the eighth century, refers to the miraculous withdrawal of the Twelfth Imām for a divine purpose. Chapter 2 provides the details of this doctrine.

[5] Pew Research Center asserts that of the total Muslim population, 10–13% are Shī'ah Muslims and 87–90% are Sunni Muslims. Most Shī'ah (between 68% and 80%) live in just four countries: Iran, Pakistan, India and Iraq. Significant Shī'ah pockets also exist in Kuwait, Azerbaijan, Yemen, Turkey and Syria, forming a Shī'ah crescent, a potential power block that worries many Sunni Muslims as well as Western powers. Pew-Templeton Global Religious Futures Project, "Muslims," [on-line]; accessed on September 4, 2014; available from http://www.globalreligiousfutures.org/religions/muslims/; Internet

[6] His name at birth was Ruhollah al-Musavi and he was the most important leader and jurist of the twentieth century and founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979. He was born in a small village of Khomeini, which was later added to his name. Khomeini was also given the title of respect "Sayyid" which means "lord." Later, in the1960s, Khomeini received another title, "Grand Ayatollah," making him one of the most powerful religious leaders in his country. See Roy Jackson, *Fifty Key Figures in Islam* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 186–90. For a short biography on Khomeini, see Baqer Moin, "Khomeini, Ruhollah Al-Musavi," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World*, ed. John Esposito (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 338–42. Mahmoud Ahmadi Nejad (Ahmadinejad) became Iran's sixth president on June 24, 2005. He was born in 1956 and earned his Doctor in Transportation Engineering and Planning from Science and Technology University (STU) in 1997. His engagement with religious and political meetings flourished during his study time at STU and he founded the STU Islamic Students Association. See Joseph A. Kechichian, "Ahmadinejad, Mahmoud," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World*, ed. John L. Esposito (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 79–81.

[7] Abbas Amanat, *Apocalyptic Islam and Iranian Shi'ism* (New York: IB Tauris, 2009), 221–44.

United Nations on September 26, 2012, Ahmadinejad deliberately inserted Shī'ah eschatological doctrine about the Mahdi. Arguing that the world is declining politically, culturally, environmentally, economically, and morally, Ahmadinejad proposed that the world is in need of "a new world order and a fresh way of thinking."[8] Ahmadinejad, who is the first non-clerical president Iran has elected, claims the only way to accomplish this new world order is to wait expectantly for the arrival of Al-Imām Al-Mahdi accompanied by Jesus Christ. Strikingly, Ahmadinejad avers, the Mahdi is the "ultimate savior" for humankind.[9]

Ahmadinejad is also known for using his millenarian beliefs and the expectation for the return of the Mahdi in his political campaign to become the mayor of Teheran in 2003 despite criticisms from his rivals.[10] When running for president in 2005, he warned his audience of the similarity between the Iranian revolution and the transformation led by Shī'ah's third imām, Husayn.[11] Soon after his election as president, Ahmadinejad affirmed that the ultimate leader of Iran was the Twelfth Imām and that the enactment of the country's policy should include an emphasis on the expectation of his

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[8] Jerome R. Corsi, "Ahmadinejad tells U.N. messiah's return at hand," accessed [on-line] April 16, 2013, http://www.wnd.com/2012/09/ahmadinejad-to-u-n-messiahs-return-at-hand/. Ahmadinejad's first controversial speech pertaining to the return of Jesus and the Mahdi was stated in his greetings to the Christians in Iran on Christmas 2006.

[9] "United Nations General Assembly Sixty-seventh session Ninth Plenary Meeting," Official Records, accessed [on-line] January 14, 2016; available from http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N12/522/01/PDF/N1252201.pdf?OpenElement; Internet.

[10] See Jean–Pierre Filiu, *Apocalypse in Islam*, trans. M.B. DeBevoise (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011), 141–43.

[11] Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007), 136. See also John L. Esposito, "Contemporary Islam: Reformation or Revolution," in *The Oxford History of Islam*, ed. John L. Esposito (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 663.

return.[12] In fact, Article 5 of *The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran* actually includes the statement that the Supreme Leader's authority is valid only "during the Occultation of the Mahdi.[13] Ahmadinejad also demands his ministers to sign a document as a pledge of allegiance to the Mahdi.[14]

Obviously Ahmadinejad was not the first Iranian leader to use explicitly Shī'ah eschatology in politics; he admittedly regarded Ayatollah Khomeini as both a political mentor and a religious leader.[15] The revival of Shī'ah messianic expectation in the twentieth century began during the Iranian revolution led by the First Supreme Leader of Iran, Khomeini, who focused on the awaited Mahdi throughout his revolution. Khomeini adopted the title imām and was often referred to as, *Nàeb-e Imām*, or Deputy to the Twelfth Imām.[16] The yearning for the coming of the Mahdi had motivated Khomeini to establish the Islamic state of Iran soon after he secured the leadership of Iran in 1979. Khomeini imposed what is known as *al-wilaya al-faqih* (rule of the jurisprudent) and stated that since there is no distinction between politics and religion in Islam, both of these should fall under the authority (*wilayat*) of the supreme expert or, *fiqh*, acting on

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[12] Nasr, *The Shia Revival*, 134.

[13] Article 5: During the absence (*ghayba*) of his holiness, the Lord of the Age, May God all mighty hasten his appearance, the sovereignty of the command [of God] and religious leadership of the community [of believers] in the Islamic Republic of Iran is the responsibility of the faqīh who is just, pious, knowledgeable about his era, courageous, and a capable and efficient administrator, as indicated in Article 107. The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, [on-line] accessed on July 30, 2018; available from http://www.wipo.int/edocs/lexdocs/laws/en/ir/ir001en.pdf; Internet.

[14] Filiu, *Apocalypse in Islam*, 151–52.

[15] Con Coughlin, *Khomeini's Ghost: The Iranian Revolution and the Rise of Militant Islam* (New York: HarperCollins, 2010), 307.

[16] Ibid., 131.

behalf of the Hidden Imām during his occultation.[17] While the terms and concept of the return of the messiah are clearly prominent among the Shī'ah, this Shī'ah teaching lies in stark contrast to the Christian doctrine of last things based on eschatological writings within the NT.

Thesis

The purpose of this dissertation is to examine the concept of millennialism within Shī'ah Islam and evangelical Christianity in order to demonstrate the consistencies and reliability of each theological position.[18] This examination will compare the person of the Mahdi in Shī'ah eschatology and the person of Christ in evangelical eschatology. These figures are crucial to the understanding of the concept of millennialism in Christianity and Shī'ah, and therefore, require significant attention in this dissertation.

Since many in Shī'ah teaching, such as the millennium, the day of judgment, the concept of imminence, and the fate of the Jews, are similar to the tenets of biblical evangelical premillennialism, the premillennial eschatological approach will be employed in this dissertation.[19] Premillennialism will be considered a comparative doctrine between

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[17] For a brief treatment on Khomeini's influence in the Middle East see Caesar E. Farrah, *Islam: Beliefs and Observances* (New York: Barron's Educational Series, 2003), 390–94. The Supreme Leader and his administration allegedly used the visit of the Mahdi on a white horse to provoke the soldiers' courage during Iraq–Iran war in 1980. See Nasr, *The Shia Revival*, 132.

[18] David Bebbington defines the four marks that characterize evangelical Christianity as conversionism, activisim, biblicism, and crucentrism. These four qualities are known as the evangelical quadrilateral. See David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Brittain: A History from tge 1730s to the 1980s* (Leicester, UK: Inter-Varsity Press, 1979), 2–17. In general, all evangelicals "look for the visible personal return of Jesus Christ to set up his kingdom of righteousness, a new heaven and earth, one that will never end." R. V. Pierard and Walter A. Elwell, Evangelicalism in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 405–9.

[19] This research recognizes that the premillennial position is contested even within evangelical scholarship. Premillennialism teaches that several signs such as wars, famines, earthquakes, the coming of the Antichrist, and the great tribulation will precede the return of Christ. This study interprets the millennium, or one thousand years, as mentioned in Revelation 20 literally, meaning that Christ will reign

Islam and Christianity as it is appears to be the doctrinal system within the evangelical theology that can most adequately address Islamic eschatology, particularly those of Shī'ah eschatology with respect to the role of Jesus Christ in His *parousia.* While scholars from postmillennialism and amillennialism present valid arguments, these two branches of Christian eschatology will not be considered in this dissertation.

There are several primary and secondary sources engaged in this dissertation; the Bible will be the primary source for examining the evangelical concept of Jesus Christ and Christian expectation of the millennium, while the secondary sources will be the writing of modern premillennial theologians. In evaluating the Shī'ah eschatological position, the Qur'ān and Shī'ah hadīth will be the primary sources and the work of contemporary Shī'ah theologians the secondary sources.

The Relevance of the Research

Within Christianity and Islam, eschatology has become one of the main theological discussions in the twenty-first century. This research is relevant to address the eschatological comparison between Christianity and Islam, particularly the concept of messianic figures in the millennial eschatology these two religions.[20] Hence, it is

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on earth for about a thousand years. For a brief treatment on the three millennial views in Christian eschatology see R.G. Clouse, "Views of the Millennium," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 770–74. See also Craig A. Blaising, "Premillennialism," in *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond*, ed. Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991). Postmillennialism and amillennialism, on the other hand, do not believe in the literal reign of Christ for a thousand years.

[20] Although some theologians have published works pertaining to the comparison of these two beliefs, it appears that the topic of messianic expectations is still lacking from discussions. For example, Norman L. Geisler and Abdul Saleeb, *Answering Islam: The Crescent in Light of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993). This book has become a standard textbook for missiology classes in seminaries. The book was written as an apologetic text for Christians to provide answers for the Muslims and focused its discussion on the topic of the doctrine of the Bible, the Trinity and the Deity of Jesus, and salvation. Regrettably, Geisler and Saleeb provide little information on the issue of eschatology in this excellent book.

important for Christians to have a proper understanding of the Islamic eschatology for several reasons demonstrated below.

Islamic Eschatology in Christian Theology

From an academic perspective, Christian theologians should have an accurate understanding of Islamic theology for a beneficial interaction between the two religions.[21] Several Christian theologians have contributed to unpublished dissertations as well as published works dealing with Islamic eschatology. Samuel Shahid in *The Last Trumpet* discusses the comparison between Christian and Islamic eschatology. Islam, argues Shahid, has reduced the role of Jesus Christ "to fit the concept of Isa (the Qur'ānic name for Jesus) as a mere prophet who will return to proclaim to the entire world that Islam is

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See also James R. White, *What Every Christians Needs to Know About the Qur'ān* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 2013). This book intends to help Christians understand Islamic teaching in the Qur'ān. Similar to *Answering Islam*, White deals mostly with the Qur'ān, the Trinity, and salvation. Timothy George of Samford University centered his book on the issue of the Trinity and the deity of Jesus in *Is The Father of Jesus The God of Muhammad: Understanding the Differences Between Christianity and Islam* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002). See also George W. Baswell, Jr. *Islam: Its Prophet, Peoples, Politics and Power* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 1996). It is surprising that Baswell, who has taught on the faculty of Islamic Theology of the University of Teheran, left out the discussion on the Mahdi in his book considering the importance of this teaching for the Iranians.

[21] For an example of a misrepresentation of Islamic theology in one of the most scholarly works of Christian systematic theology, see Herman Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics*. The Mahdi, according to Bavinck, would "take believers back to the golden age of the four righteous Kalifs." See Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 648. Bavinck fully relied on his assertion on the work of Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje, *Der Mahdi*. Hurgronje was a Dutch expert on Islam and spent his time in Mecca and Indonesia. Both Bavinck and Hurgronje provided inaccurate information by referring to the golden age of the four caliphs and thus the mission of the Mahdi to bring Muslims back to this era. The early Shī'ah actually refused to accept the leadership of the other three caliphs since the death of Muhammad. See Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi. *The Divine Guide in Early Shiism: The Source of Esotericism in Islam*, trans. David Streight. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 87–9. See also Karl-Heinrich Göbel, "Imāmate," trans. Hamid Dabashi in *Expectation of the Milennium: Shi'ism in History* (New York, State University Press, 1989), 5. Göbel refers to Abu-Bakr, Uthman, and Umar as "usurpers and unworthy of their office." See also Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islam: Religion, History, and Civilization* (New York: HarperSanFranscisco, 2002), 12–13.

the true religion of God."[22] While Shahid does not deal primarily with Shī'ah eschatology, his treatment of the Mahdi and the Shī'ah version of Jesus provides a solid foundation on which to build and advance discussions.

The editor of *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology*, Jerry L. Walls, included the eschatology of the world religions in this book. Walls admits that the purpose is more than just a comparative study but also "for understanding the internal logic of different religions and how that logic gives distinctive shape to their understanding of eschatology."[23] He also believes that the addition of the eschatology of other religions is "crucial to understand the conflicting visions of where our world is headed and what it all means."[24] In order to achieve this purpose, Walls entrusted the chapter on Muslim eschatology to William C. Chittick.[25] Interestingly, Chittick, a recognized scholar of Shī'ah studies, does not discuss Shī'ah messianic expectation in this book.

Islamic Eschatology in Christian-Muslim Dialogue

David Cook in *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic* points out that Islam originated as an apocalyptic movement and strongly maintains this message throughout history. Along with this apocalyptic movement, Islam also presents the messianic character who will restore the purity of this religion and unify the world under one banner–Islam. Cook

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[22] Samuel Shahid, *The Last Trumpet: A Comparative Study in Christian Islamic Eschatology* (USA: Xulon Press, 2005), 14.

[23] Jerry L. Walls, "Introduction," in *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 4.

[24] Ibid., 16.

[25] William C. Chittick currently teaches religious studies in the Department of Asian and Asian-American Studies at Stony Brook University in New York.

also compellingly demonstrates that there was a "transfer of religious knowledge and symbols from the classical and Christian worlds into Islam" and that the Islamic literature on apocalyptic topics did not originate from the Qur'ān or *hadīth* but from non-Islamic sources.[26]

Islamic Eschatology in World Politics

Timothy Furnish in *Eschatology as Politics, Eschatology as Theory: Modern Sunni Arab Mahdism in Historical Perspective* focuses his study on the concept of the Mahdi in Sunni Islam particularly after the Six-Day War in 1967, which he defines as the "great defining moment in modern Arab history."[27] Furnish denies the generalization common in the Western world that the teachings related to the Mahdi only belong to the Shī'ah. He based his argument on the fact that two out of four Mahdi movements in history were non-Shī'ah.[28] Although Furnish was convinced that the Sunni Arab indisputably held the doctrine of the Mahdi, he found that it is "actively expounded and defended by only a minority of them."[29] In spite of their emphasis on the modern Sunni Mahdi movement, it provides an excellent examination on the characteristic of the Mahdi itself.

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[26] See David Cook, *Muslim Apocalyptic*, 2–7. Cook admitted that one of the problematic questions dealing with this issue is how precisely this material pass into Islam. Cook is convinced that some of the Muslim's apocalyptic literature came from Jewish and Christian books.

[27] Timothy Furnish, "Eschatology as Politics, Eschatology as Theory: Modern Sunni Arab Mahdism in Historical Perspective" (Ph.D. diss., Columbus: Ohio State University, 2001), 1.

[28] Furnish, "Eschatology as Politics," 12.

[29] Ibid., 270.

Islamic Eschatology and Christian Evangelism

The discussion of the Mahdi is not a minor matter for neither Christian nor Muslim in this modern world. The poll conducted by "The Pew Forum" shows that no less than 780 million Muslims are expecting the coming of the Mahdi in their lifetime.[30] One also needs to remember that the rise of radicalism and extremism among Iranian leadership in 1979 is intertwined with anticipation of the Mahdi's return. The important question is: How does one use all of the discussions above to accomplish the Great Commission among Muslims? While interfaith dialogue is necessary and is to be encouraged, evangelism should be the ultimate goal of every Christian who values Christian-Islamic relations. Several points of discussion are presented to build the bridge between the Christian gospel and Shī'ah. The fact that both Christians and Shī'ah are awaiting this messianic figure allow Christians to use the topic to approach the Shī'ah for evangelism.

Scope of the Present Investigation

The present study limits concentration to Shī'ah doctrine for several reasons. First, while teachings about the Mahdi can be found in both Shī'ah literature and Sunni writings, only the Shī'ah profoundly anticipate the coming of the Mahdi. Second, while Muslims would generally deny the death of Christ on the cross, some Shī'ah writers invoke the comparison between the Christian view of the crucifixion and substitutionary atonement and the martyrdom of Husayn, without embracing the former. Hence, it at

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[30] Pew Research Center, *"The World's Muslims: Unity and Diversity,"*[on-line]; accessed April 16, 2013; available from http://www.pewforum.org/Muslim/the-worlds-muslims-unity-and-diversity-3-articles-of-faith.aspx; Internet.

least opens the possibility of arguing for the Lordship of Christ.[31] Third, the doctrines of the sinlessness and infallibility of the imāms are only found in Shī'ah, and these will serve as the basis to launch arguments advocating the deity of Christ. Finally, this investigation will limit the scope of literature to the English translation of several primary Shī'ah sources such as: *Al-Kāfi fi 'ilm al-dīn* by Abū Dja'far Muhammad bin Ya'kub bin Ishāk Al-Rāzï,[32] *Nahj Al-Balaghah* by Abu'l Hasan Muhammad ibn al-Husayn ar-Radi Al-Musawi, *Kitāb Al-Irshād: the Book of Guidance* by Shaykh al-Mufīd, and *Bihār Al-Anwār: The Book of Occultation* by 'Allāmah Muhammad Bāqir al-Majilisī.[33] It will also include the works of present-day Shī'ah scholars since their dialogue revolves around messianic expectations.

The Methodology of the Research

The methodology employed throughout this dissertation is a comparative analysis of Islamic and Christian eschatology using both the Qur'ān and the Bible. Theological writings from Christian and Muslim scholars are fairly assessed including

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[31] Hamid Enayat argues that "just as Christ sacrificed himself on the altar of the cross to redeem humanity, so did Husayn allow himself to be killed on the plain of Karbala to purify the Muslim community of sins." Hamid Enayat, "Martyrdom" in *Expectation for the Millennium: Shiism in History*, 53. Here Enayat is comparing Shī'ah's third imām to Christ and believes that the two were martyrs. Hamid Dabashi also believes that there is a similarity between the Shī'ah conception of Husayn and Christian conception of Christ. See Hamid Dabashi, *Shiism*, 80. See also Edward Browne, *Literary History of Persian*, Vol IV (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 161.

[32] Abu Jàfar Muhammad ibn Yàqub al-Kulaynī, *Al-Kāfī*, trans. by Muhammad Sarwar, vol. 1, 2nd. ed. (New York: The Islamic Seminary, 2015).

[33] Abu'l Hasan Muhammad ibn al-Husayn ar-Radi Al-Musawi, *Nahj Al-Balāghah: Selection from Sermons, Letters, and Saying of Amir Al-Mu'minin: Ali Ibn Abi Talib*, trans. by Ali Reza (Qum, Iran: Ansariyan Publications, 2011). Shaykh al-Mufīd, *Kitāb al-Irshād: The Book of Guidance*, trans. by I.K.A. Howard, 2nd. ed. (Elmhurst, NY: Tahrike Tarsile Qur'ān Inc., 2015). 'Allāmah Muhammad Bāqir al-Majilisī, *Bihar al-Anwar: The Book of Occultation Kitāb Al-Ghaibah*, trans. by Hassan Allahyari, vol 51 (Qum, Iran: Ansariyan Publications, 2000).

important biblical and qur'ānic texts pertaining to this issue. The Bible, obviously, is the most important source for this dissertation. Thus, a vigorous engagement of key passages focusing on the *eschaton* along with commentaries that deal with these particular texts will follow.

Biblical Texts

No less than seven eschatological passages will be engaged in this dissertation. The signs of Christ's return in Matthew 24:1–44 will be used to evaluate the major and minor signs in Islam's eschatology. The depiction of Christ's superiority as the ultimate judge of the world in Matthew 25:31–46 necessitates comparison with Muslim conceptions of the Mahdi in his role as arbitrator. Christ's triumphant return in conjunction with the eschatological day of the Lord also warrants discussion (1Cor 15:50–58, cf. 1Thess 4:13–18, 5:1–11, Rev 19). Finally, this survey of the biblical material examines Revelation 20:1–10 to discuss the significance of premillennialism and the importance of the defeat of Satan after the 1,000 years.

Qur'ānic Texts

While the references to the signs of end times are ubiquitous in the Qur'ān, it actually provides very little information about the return of the Mahdi. Out of 6,666 verses in the Qur'ān, only two explicitly talk about the coming of this messianic figure. The first one mentioned earlier is Sūrah 3:55 and the other one is Sūrah 43:61.[34] However, it is important to note that all translators unanimously agreed that the name of

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[34] Sūrah 43:61 declares, "And (Jesus) shall be a Sign (for the coming of) the Hour (of Judgment): therefore have no doubt about the (Hour), but follow ye Me: this is a Straight Way."

Jesus is explicitly mentioned in the former verse but not the latter one. Interestingly, the name of Jesus in Sūrah 43:61 does not appear in the original text, but some translators such as Yusuf Ali, Sahih International, and Muhsin Khan assume an implicit reference to him. The word *Innahū* itself could be translated, "it is" or "he is."[35] The debate between Islamic scholars pertaining to this particular text will be examined in this dissertation while the rest of the texts that deal with the word *qiyāma* will also be appropriately discussed.

Hadīth

Since the Qur'ān is almost silent about the detailed teaching of Mahdi, one cannot avoid using the *hadīth* to comprehend this topic, though there is the inherent complexity of deciding which ones are reliable.[36] In fact, Muslim writers would heavily depend on the *hadīth* when discussing eschatology. As the second canonical source in Islamic studies, the *hadīth* plays an important role in understanding Islamic teachings.

Hadīth are the record of the sayings or traditions of Muhammad that were not compiled until the ninth and tenth centuries. The six collections of *hadīth* that are recognized by Sunni are (1) *al-Bukhari* (d. 870), (2) *Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj* (d. 874), (3) *Abu Adud* (d. 888), (4) *al-Tirmidhi* (d. 892), (5) *Ibn Maja* (d. 892), and (6) *Al-Nasai* (d. 915). As a result of the split, the Shī'ah refused to recognize these *hadīth* since the sources were derived from the first three caliphs—Abū Bakr, Umar, and Uthmān—who were considered corrupt by the Shī'ah. Therefore, the Shī'ah developed their own *hadīth*

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[35] Chapter 4 provides more detail information about the examination of the word "*innahū.*"

[36] For a summary of the challenges of using *hadīth* in Muslim scholarship see Aishya Y. Musa, *Hadith as Scripture: Discussions on the Authority of Prophetic Traditions in Islam* (New York: Palgrave Macmilan, 2008).

collection by the tenth century. Their canonical *hadīth* collections include the following: *al-Kāfi fi 'ilm al-dīn* (*The Sufficient in the Knowledge of Religion*) by Abū Dja'far Muhammad bin Ya'kub bin Ishāk Al-Rāzï or al-Kulaynī (d. 939), *Man lā yahduruhu al-faqīh* (*For him not in the Presence of a Jurisprudent*) by Shaykh al-Sadūq Muhammad Ibn Bābūya al-Qummī (d. 991), and al-*Istibsar fi mā ukhtulif fīhi min al-akhbār* (*Reflection upon the Disputed Traditions*) and *Tahdīb al-ahkām* (*Rectification of the Statutes*), both works by Shaykh al-Tā'ifah Muhammad al-Tūsī (d. 1067).[37] One of the problematic issues about Islamic eschatology is deciding which *hadīth* is *sahih* (sound), *hasan* (good), or *daif* (weak), or even *mawdu* (made up).[38] Although this dissertation centers its discussion on the Shī'ah teaching, Sunni *hadīth* that describe the return of Jesus will also be included. As mentioned above, this dissertation will primarily employ *Al-Kāfī fi 'ilm al-dīn* by al-Kulaynī.

Al-Kulaynī and *Al-Kāfī fi 'ilm al-dīn*

Abū Dja'far Muhammad bin Ya'kub bin Ishāk Al-Rāzï was born in a village called Kulayn, southwest of Ray. The date of his birth is unknown, but it is almost certain that he came from a noble family. Shī'ah historians differed on the year of his death; however, he most likely died in Baghdad in May of 940.[39] He spent several years in Qum

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[37] John E. Campo, "Hadith" in *Encyclopedia of Islam* (New York: Checkmark Books, 2009) 278–80. See also, 'Allāmah Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tabātabā'ī, "*A Shiite Anthology,*" trans. by William C. Chittick (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1981), 16.

[38] Chawkat Moucarry, *Faith to Faith: Christianity & Islam in Dialogue* (Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 54–5.

[39] Etan Kohlberg, "Kolayni," in *Encyclopedia Iranica* (*EIr*).

but spent twenty years of his life in Baghdad teaching and compiling *Al-Kāfī*.[40] Prominent to the life of al-Kulaynī is his special relationship with the four deputies of the Twelfth Imām: 1) 'Uthman ibn Sàid al-'Amri; 2) Abu Jàfar Muhammad; 3) Abu al-Wasim Husayn ibn Ruh; 4) 'Ali ibn Muhammad al-Samuri. Dabashi concurs that this special association with these four deputies makes *Al-Kāfī* more reliable.[41]

There are several reasons for using *Al-Kāfī fi 'ilm al-dīn*[42] as the primary source for this dissertation. First, Nasīru'd-Dīn Tūsī, a thirteenth-century Persian scholar, considered al-Kulaynī as the most reliable source in *hadīth*.[43] Second, as mentioned previously, al-Kulaynī was a contemporary of all four deputies of the Twelfth Imām, and thus he was entrusted with the responsibility to collect the *hadīth* from reliable Shī'ah sources.[44] Third, the fact that *Al-Kāfī* contains more than 15,000 traditions collected during the period of 20 years provide what Dabashi refers to as "the most basic conceptual and pragmatic foundation of the Shī'ah Law."[45]

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[40] Andrew J. Newman, *The Formative Period*, 1.

[41] Dabashi, *Shi'ism*, 65.

[42] Hereafter will refer as *al-Kāfi*.

[43] His full name is Khwāja Nasīru'd-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī, or simply known as al-Tūsī, was born in 1201 and died in 1274. Prior to his writing contribution to the Twelvers theology, al-Tūsī wrote books in accordance with Ismā'īlī doctrine. He also wrote on astronomy, mathematics, and medicine. See Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam: The History and Doctrines of Twelver Shi'ism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 322.

[44] See al-Kulaynī, *Al-Kāfī*, xv–xvi. Tabātabā'ī refers his work as "the most trustworthy and celebrated work of *hadīth* known in the Shi'ite world." See Tabātabā'ī, *Shi'ite Islam*, 109–10.

[45] Dabashi, *Shī'ism*, 65.

However, the acceptance of *al-Kāfi* as an authoritative Shī'ah source of law did not begin until the late tenth century when al-Tūsī widely employed this work. One reason for the late acceptance is because some of the earlier Shī'ah writers such as Ibn al-Nadīm and Ahmad b. 'Abdūn doubted the authenticity of some traditions in *Al-Kāfi*.[46] His doubt concerned the *Al-Kāfi* writing period, considered as the time of confusion during the occultation.[47] Among the contemporary contributors, *Al-Kāfi* is highly esteemed due to its significance in helping early Shī'ah scholars develop their doctrine. Sachedina regards al-Kulyanī's contribution as important as *Hadīth* al-Bukhari among the Sunni circles,[48] while Dabashi puts *Al-Kāfi* as the most important book among the *Kutub al-Arbàah* (*The Four Books*).[49]

The Definitions

Islamic scholars deliberately use terms that are of Christian origin, but they do not necessarily present the accurate meaning within Islamic doctrine. Problems arise when dealing with the same terminologies that are used in both religions yet with different meanings, particularly in academic writings such as this dissertation. Two key terms found in Shī'ah writings: messiah, or savior, and millennium, necessitate clarification before the discussion furthers.

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[46] Wilfred Madelung, "Al-Kulaynī" in *EI2*. See also Etan Kohlberg, "Kolayni" in *EIr*.

[47] Amir-Moezzi, *The Spiritually of Shi'i Islam*, 435.

[48] See Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism*, 33.

[49] Dabashi, *Shī'ism*, 64–5.

Messiah and Savior

When reading Islamic eschatology, one readily discovers the terms "messiah" or "savior" employed in the relevant texts. One could therefore reach the conclusion that the Old Testament use of "messiah" and the New Testament use of "savior" share an equivalent meaning with Islam concerning the promise of the messiah. Islamic scholars, however, differ significantly from Christianity in how they doctrinally define "messiah" or "savior." Sachedina purposefully employs the term messiah in his book, *Islamic Messianism*, arguing that although the term "ha(s) a specifically Judeao-Christian ring and imply a whole series of Jewish-Christian doctrines, it is, nevertheless, perfectly permissible to employ the terms in an Islamic context, if we are quite certain at the outset in what sense we are using them."[50] Furthermore, Sachedina clearly distinguishes between the idea of an Islamic messiah and that of Judaism and Christianity.

In the case of Islam, the messiah's purpose is to restore the purity of the faith, which, according to him, "will bring true and uncorrupted guidance to all mankind, creating a just social order and a world free from oppression in which the Islamic revelation will be the norm for all nations."[51] Similarly, Muhammad Ali Amir-Moezzi purposefully employs the term 'savior' and 'messiah' interchangeably to describe the Mahdi who "will come to conquer violently and finally the forces of evil on earth."[52] It is

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[50] Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism,* 1–2.

[51] Ibid. Other Islamic scholars N. Vasram and A. Toussi admit that the messianic idea in Islamic eschatology did not originate solely within the Islamic faith. See N. Vasram and A. Toussi, *The Qur'an According to Shi'ite Qur'an Commentators* (Iran: Ansariyan Publication, 2008), 127.

[52] Muhammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, "Eschatology in Imami Shi'ism" in *EIr*, vol VIII (1998): 575–76.

apparent that Sachedina and Amir-Moezzi find the term messiah or savior perfectly suitable for employment in Islamic eschatology.

Conversely, non-Shī'ah writers such as Riffat Hassan argue that the idea of messianism is alien in normative Islam since the Qur'ān repudiates the main components of the idea of messianism, which is redemption.[53] The idea of of Shī'ah messianism, according to Hassan, "does not fit theologically or logically into the framework of normative Islam."[54] Along the lines of Hassan, Timothy Furnish also contends that the term "messianism" has no place in an Islamic context since the term has to do with a deliverer, which is contra Islamic theology. He asserts that when the Qur'ān employs the term "*al-Masih*," it is simply an honorific title.[55] Albeit the disagreement among Islamic scholars, this present study deems that because of the frequent reference to "Messiah" by Shī'ah scholars, this dissertation can appropriately use this term.

Millennialism

The second term that necessitates explication is "millennialism." In premillennial theology, this term refers to the coming of Christ to "establish and rule over a kingdom on this earth" for one thousand years as mentioned in Revelation 20.[56]

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[53] See Riffat Hassan, "Messianism and Islam," in *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 22, no 2 (1985): 261–91. One needs to understand that in her article Hassan tries to argue that the Qur'ān rejects the whole notion of the Mahdi in Shī'ah eschatology. Hassan provides seven observations some of which will be discussed in later chapters.

[54] Ibid., 268. Hassan clarifies that normative Islam is defined by the Qur'ān and there is no other Islamic source that surpasses the Qur'ān's authority.

[55] See Timothy Furnish, "Islam," in *Encyclopedia of Millennialism and Millennial Movements*, ed. Richard Landes (New York: Routledge, 2001), 187.

[56] Blaising, "Premillennialism," 157.

Although multifarious Christian understandings surround the millennium, the present study takes a literal premillennialist interpretation of Revelation 20.[57] Islamic scholars deliberately employ the term millennium or millennarianism in discussing the future ideal of Islamic society. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, for example, entitled his anthology, *Expectation of the Millennium: Shi'ism in History*.[58] Regrettably, none of the editors or writers in this book felt the necessity to explain their understanding of the term, millennium, which seems to be the pattern among Islamic scholars.[59]

Other writers choose terminologies other than millennium to differentiate from that of Christianity. One suggestion comes from Furnish who prefers using the term "centennialism" instead of millennialism since the latter derives from the term taught in Revelation 20. In Islamic beliefs, this millennial period is the "expectation of a future ideal society."[60] Although using this same term, Marica Hermansen has a different understanding on how "centennialism" fits in Islamic eschatology. She believes that "centennialism" is the time when a "Renewer (*mujaddid*) would appear in the Muslim

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[57] Blaising, "Premillennialism," 157.

[58] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Hamid Dabashi, and Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr, eds., *Expectation of the Millennium: Shi'ism in History* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1989).

[59] William F. Tucker, *Mahdis and Millenarians: Shī'ite Extremists in Early Muslim Iraq* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), xviii. Tucker excludes Said Amir Arjomand in this category since the latter provides the definition of millenarianism in his book. See Said Amir Arjomand, *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam: Religion, Political Order, and Societal Change in Shi'ite Iran from the Beginning to 1890* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

[60] See Furnish, "Islam," 187. Furnish further explains that Islamic millennialism has more similarities to that of Judaism since the ultimate goal of the Mahdi and the Messiah is not for individual salvation, but rather for collective justice and peace.

community at the beginning of every century."[61] Hermansen, however, concurred that the concept of *mujaddid* is in contrast to the Mahdi. She further explains that Muslims believe in several "renewers" who have appeared throughout Islamic history, both from Sunni and Shī'ah.[62]

Among the Shī'ah, Khomeini was the one perceived as the renewer.[63] Others, such as Said Amir Arjomand and Sachedina, prefer to use "chiliastic" referring to a period where the Mahdi will "fill the world with justice and equity."[64] The difference between the Christian millennium and the Shī'ah chiliastic period is that the former believe in a literal one thousand years while the latter differs on the length of this period.[65]

Regardless of the terminology, the period of justice and equity in Shī'ah millennial eschatology demands a messianic figure. Jean–Pierre Filiu's notably remarks concerning this issue to set the stage here:

> [A]pocalyptic writings in Islam are remarkable for combining the two, so that messianism, associated with the expectation that a redemptive and supernatural figure will one day appear, is inseparable from millenarianism, marked by a restless search for signs of the end of the world and an obsession with numerological divination.[66]

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[61] Marcia Hermansen, "Eschatology" in *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, ed. Tim Winter (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 316.

[62] Ibid.

[63] See Campo, "Renewal and Reform Movements," in *Encyclopedia of Islamic History*, 585–89.

[64] Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism*, 150. See also Arjomand, *The Shadow of God*, 66–84.

[65] Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism,* 176.

[66] Filiu, *Apocalypse in Islam*, xxi.

Outline of the Study

The second chapter commences with a survey of Muslim eschatological teaching in the Qur'ān, particularly the concept of *qiyāma*. Next, it provides the history of Christian communities in Pre-Islamic Arabia to help the reader understand the possible influence of Jewish and Christian teachings on the development of Muslim eschatology. Then this chapter provides a brief history of the first century of Islamic history that serves as the background for Shī'ah theology. Fourth, this chapter traces the discussions on the Twelvers in three main sects of the early Shī'ah. Fifth, this current study introduces the primary *hadīth* used in this dissertation, *Al-Kāfi*, and its teachings on the Mahdi. Finally, this chapter presents a thorough examination of the concept of the Twelfth Imām along with their concept of Imāmate and the occultations.

Chapter three presents the consistencies of the return of Christ in Christian eschatology. First, the discussion begins with a brief survey of the New Testament teachings on Jesus as the messiah. Second, this chapter builds the foundation for the argument in the later chapter by presenting the sacrificial death of Christ, His resurrection, the ascension, and the eternality of Jesus from the New Testament passages. Finally, chapter three surveys the writings of the church fathers on the return of Christ and the writings of recent premillennial theologians in order to show the consistencies of Christian teachings on the return of Christ.

Chapter four employs the groundwork laid in chapter three to argue with the Shī'ah aspects of the return of the Mahdi. This begins by examining the reliability of the prophecies and the narratives of their births. Second, this chapter will investigate the teaching on the sinlessness of Jesus to highlight a fundamental distinction that exists in the doctrine of the Mahdi. Then the chapter displays the certainty of the ascension of

Jesus compared to the ambiguous concept of the occultation of the Mahdi. The chapter concludes by contrasting the *parousia* of Christ and return of the Mahdi.

Chapter five, the conclusion, contrasts messianic expectation of Christianity and the Shī'ah. It begins by comparing aspects of the expectations of the two beliefs. Second, this chapter presents some challenges in Shī'ah eschatology and discusses the political implication of Christ return in Christianity and the Mahdi in Shī'ah. Finally, this chapter suggests some recommendations for further research in Christian–Shī'ah dialogue.

CHAPTER 2

MAHDI IN SHĪ'AH ESCHATOLOGY

> "O mighty Lord," he implored, "I pray to you to hasten the emergence of your last repository, the Promised One, that perfect and pure human being, the one who will fill this world with justice and peace. Make us worthy to prepare the way for his arrival and lead us with your righteous hand. We long for the Lord of the Age. We long for the Awaited One. Without him—the Righteously Guided One—there can be no victory. With him, there can be no defeat. Show me your path, O mighty Lord, and use me to prepare the way for the coming of the Mahdi."[1]

These words detail the prayer of Ayatollah Hamid Hosseini, the character of Iranian Supreme Leader in Joel Rosenberg's best-selling novel – *The Twelfth Imām*. Published in 2010, *The Twelfth Imām* accurately depicts the desire of Khomeini, Ahmadinejad, and other Shī'ah leaders to implement all things necessary to expedite the return of the Mahdi. They believe the controversial Iran nuclear program of the twenty-first century furthers this anticipated event. One should understand that it is impossible to divorce a Shī'ah's political ideology from his theology.[2] In his defense regarding the political aspect of Shī'ah Mahdi, Muhammad Àlī Amir Moezzi explains that the politicization of Imāmism is "the result of a long doctrinal and historical process lasting

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[1] Joel Rosenberg, *The Twelfth Imām* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2011), 202.

[2] Or, in the words of Syed Husayn M. Jafri, "It is therefore difficult to speak, at any stage of its existence, about the 'political' Shi'a as distinct from the 'religious' one." Syed Husayn M Jafri, "*Origins and Early Development of Shi'a Islam*" (Beirut: Librairie Du Liban, 1990), 1–2. See also Anthony McRoy, "Shia Eschatology in Contemporary Islamic Politics" in *Islam and the Last Day: Christian Perspective on Islamic Eschatology* (Melbourne: Melbourne School of Theology, 2014), 91–109.

several centuries."[3] Thus, it is imperative to gain a proper understanding of this expectation by providing the historical background of Shī'ah, partiulcarly *Shīi 'Ithnā-'Ashari.* This dissertation primarily focuses on the Shī'ah, therefore, it will be in the perspective of its writers.[4]

This chapter seeks to provide a historical background of the Shī'ah's expectation in relation to the return of the Mahdi as expounded in *Al-Kāfi* and their interpretation of the Qur'ān. In order to achieve this objective, it is necessary to provide the history of Christian communities in Pre-Islamic Arabia to help readers understand the possible influence of Jewish and Christian teachings on the development of Muslim eschatology while demonstrating the possible Muslim misunderstanding about the person of Christ. A brief history of the post-Muhammad Islamic community and the Shī'ah-Sunni conflict serves as the background for the Shī'ah messianic expectation. Finally, a thorough examination of the concept of the Mahdi among the Shī'ah will be presented along with their concept of Imāmate and the occultation of the Twelfth Imām.

Christian Communities in the Pre-Islamic Arab

Although two passages in the Bible mention Arabia, it is difficult to substantiate the existence of Arab Christians in the early New Testament era. While Arabic people were present in Jerusalem during the Pentecost, Acts 2 clearly explains

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[3] Amir Moezzi provides a section in one of the chapters of his book to demonstrate that the Shī'ah doctrine of imāmate and the Mahdi are inseparable from politics by tracing the involvement of three of the twelve imāms in politics. See Muhammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shi'ism: The Sources of Esotericism in Islam*, trans. David Streight (Albany, New York: State University of New York, 1994), 61–7.

[4] Since both Sunni and Shī'ah historians differ in the historical narrative pertaining to the on-going conflict, this paper will take the Shī'ah perspective while supplying the footnotes on the Sunni perspective when deemed necessary.

that they were devout Jews, not necessarily Arabs. The time Paul spent in Arabia, as mentioned in his letter to the Galatians, covers his preparation for ministry rather than advancing the gospel.[5] However, as the Christian faith continued to spread beyond Samaria and Judea, the existence of Christ's followers can be found in Yemen and eastern Arabia prior to the emergence of Islam.[6] Fatih Harpci provides succinct and convincing evidence about the settlements of Christians in the Arabian Peninsula for centuries, including Christian cemeteries in Mecca and the presence of Christians in the Egyptian desert following the ecclesiastical dispute of the third and fourth centuries.[7]

Numerous scholars, even the earliest Islamic historians, also confirm the existence of Christians in Arabia. For example, Ibn Ishāq in *Sīrat Rasūl Allāh*[8] asserted that,

> In Najrān there were some people who held the religion of 'Isā b. Maryam, a virtuous and upright people who followed the Gospel. Their head was named 'Abdullah n. al-Thāmir. The place where that religion took root was in Najrān, at that time the center of the Arabs' country; its people, and indeed the rest of the

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[5] See Richard Bell, *The Origins of Islam in Christian Environment* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1926), 15–6. Bell claims that one cannot build the conclusion based on what is "too rhetorical to allow us to found much upon it." He also disregards Harnack's assertion that Paul was engaged in a mission work in Arabia claiming that it is a "necessary inference." Perhaps Bell was refuting Trimingham's claim that there were followers of Jesus in Arabia two or three years after his death and that was the reason Paul spent some time in Arabia. See J. Spencer Trimingham, *Christianity Among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times* (Beirut: Librairie Du Liban, 1990), 42. For a brief discussion on the exact location of Paul in Arabia see Kenneth Cragg, *The Arab Christian: A History in the Middle East* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1991), 34–8. See also Jan Retsö, *The Arabs in Antiquity: Their history from the Assyrians to the Umayyads* (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 416–18.

[6] Michael Lecker, "Pre-Islamic Arabia," in *The New Cambridge History of Islam* vol 1, Chase F. Robinson, ed. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 161.

[7] Fatih Harpci, "Muhammad Speaking of the Messiah: Jesus in the Hadīth Tradition" Ph.D. Diss. Temple University, 2013 (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University), 679.

[8] Hereafter will be referenced "Sīra."

> Arabs, were idolaters. A Christian by the name of Faymiyūn had settled there and converted the people to his religion.[9]

Later on, in this account, Ibn Ishāq describes Faymiyūn as someone who was faithful to his religion by keeping Sunday as a day of rest and performed miracles such as cursing a poisonous snake and healing sick people. The authenticity of Faymiyūn's faith becomes a problem when it was described that he was performing *rak'as* before cursing the palm-tree.[10]

Ibn Ishāq also told the story of how Muhammad's companion was ensconced in the Christian empire, Abyssinia.[11] Another Muslim historian, Caesar Farah, affirms the presence of small Christian settlements in Arabia due to trading, marriage, and slavery.[12] A Catholic theologian, Hans Küng, suggests there was a small group of Christians in Mecca, possibly from a Jewish background, who had never accepted the creeds.[13] All of

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[9] Ibn Ishāq, *Sīrat Rasūl Allāh*, 14. Muhammad ibn Ishāq ibn Yasār ibn Khiyār, known as ibn Ishāq, is one of the main contributors of *sīrat rasūl allāh* along with Mūsā ibn 'Ukba and al-Wākidī. *Sīrat rasūl allāh* or *al-sira al-nabawiyya* is the traditional account of the life of Muhammad. See J. M. B. Jones, "ibn Isḥāḳ," *Encyclopedia of Islam* vol. 3, 2nd ed. (Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, 2007), 810–11. The historicity of the encounters between Muhammad and Christians as described in the Sīra has been disputed by scholars of Islamic studies. Suleiman A. Mourad in his article divides the scholars in this debate into three camps: the descriptive approach, the source-critical approach, and the skeptical approach. The first camp represents scholars who accepted these accounts without any objections, the second camp argues that while there are some problems pertaining to the reliability and the transmission, "the overall picture can still be reconstructed." The third camp rejects all the narrative and deems it as "unreliable and unreconstructable." See Suleiman A. Mourad, "Christians and Christianity in the *Sīra* of Muhammad," in *Christian-Muslim Relations. A Bibliographical History* vol 1 (600-900). David Thomas and Barbara Roggema, eds. (Boston: Brill Publications, 2009), 57–71.

[10] Ibn Ishāq, *Sīrat Rasūl Allāh,* 15–6. *Rak'as* is the order of prayer (*shalat*) in Islam.

[11] Ibid., 150–3.

[12] Caesar E. Farah. *Islam* (Hauppauge, NY: Barron's, 2003), 29–31. Farah rejects the notion of Christianity having any substantial impact on the development of the Qur'ān and Islam.

[13] Hans Küng, *Christianity and the World Religions: Paths of Dialogue with Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1986), 122.

the facts given above are in agreement with the statement Kenneth Cragg provides that can be used to conclude this section, " . . . the Christian faith had a long history within Arabia in the six centuries before Islam emerged to dominate the ethnic and cultural determinants of Arab existence—though not entirely to annex them."[14]

The Relationship of Christian Heretical Sects and Early Islam

Christians who study the Qur'ān will find numerous references of Christ that contradict traditional biblical Christology. Perhaps Irfan Shahid provides one of the more complete works pertaining to the existence of Christians in Arabia entitled, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fourth Century*. In this book, Shahid convincingly states that the Arabs in the fourth century have strong affiliations to three different Christian denominations: the Orthodox, the Nestorian, and the Monophysite.[15] Furthermore, Shahid expounds this view in his article "Islam and Oriens Christianus Makka 610–622 AD." He believes these Christian denominations directly impact the development of qur'ānic Christology and avers that the christological verse in the Qur'ān "appears very well developed in the twelve years of the Makkan period."[16] Additionally, he contends that the phrase "Isa Ibn Maryam," widely used in the Qur'ān in reference to Jesus, originates

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[14] Kenneth Cragg, *The Arab Christian: A History in the Middle East* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), 13.

[15] Irfan Shahid, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fourth Century* (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1984), 442.

[16] Irfan Shahid, "Islam and Orien Christianus: Makka 610–622 AD" in *The Encounter of Eastern Christianity with Early Islam*, Vol 5. Emmanouela Grypeou, Mark Swanson, and David Thomas. eds. (Boston: Brill, 2006), 20–1.

from the Nestorians.[17] Quss ibn Sa'īda al-Iyādī, whom Muhammad admired and learned from, employed this particular phrase.[18]

Nestorianism. The eloquent preaching of Nestorius elevated him to the position of Bishop of Constantinople in 428. The Nestorian controversy broke in 431 after Nestorius developed his Christology, teaching the two separate natures of the Incarnate Christ: the Divine and the Human.[19] Similar to the other Antiochene theologians, Nestorius "stressed the reality of the manhood of Christ."[20] Nestorius' teaching, while it attracted many followers, was condemned as a heresy at the Council of Ephesus 431. The Council declares:

> Compelled thereto by the canons and by the letter of our most holy father and fellow-servant Celestine, the Roman bishop, we have come, with many tears, to this sorrowful sentence against him, namely, that our Lord Jesus Christ, whom he has blasphemed, decrees by the holy Synod that Nestorius be excluded from the episcopal dignity, and from all priestly communion.[21]

Nestorius was exiled to Upper Egypt until his death around 451. His followers, the Nestorians, migrated to Persia and spread their teaching from the Euphrates valley as far south as the head of the Persian Gulf.

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[17] Irfan Shahid, "Islam and Orien Christianus," 9.

[18] This dissertation will provide a short section on this particular individual later on in this chapter.

[19] For a thorough examination on Nestorius' Christology, see J. N. D. Kelley, *Early Christian Doctrines* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1978), 310–17.

[20] Henry Bettenson and Chris Maunder, *Documents of the Christian Church*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 50.

[21] Phillip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds. "Decree of the Council Against Nestorius" in *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, translated by Henry R. Percival. Vol. 14. *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Second Series (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1900). Logos Bible Software.

The influence of the Nestorian Church in the development of early Islamic teaching remains indisputable.[22] Richard Bell asserts that in the seventh century the Nestorian Church had ultimately established their ground at Nisibis, Arbela, Jundeshapur, and Kashar. The winter capital of Persia, Seleucia-Ctesiphon, became the headquarters of the Patriarch of the Nestorian Church.[23] Clinton Bennett, in *Understanding Christian-Muslim Relations,* alleges that Muhammad had been acquainted with the Nestorian branch of Christianity.[24]

Concerning the impact of the Nestorians, Shahid's argument above is not without support from Islamic sources. Ibn Ishāq narrated a story of a delegation from Christians of Najrān visiting Muhammad.

> "They were Christians according to the Byzantine rite, though they differed among themselves in some points, saying He is God; and He is the son of God; and He is the third person of the Trinity, which is the doctrine of Christianity. They argue that he is God because he used to raise the dead, and heal the sick, and declare the unseen; and make clay birds and then breathe into them so that they flew away."[25]

After some discussions with Muhammad, Ibn Ishāq reported that, "The apostle was silent and did not answer them. So God sent down concerning their words and their incoherence the beginning of the Sūrah Al-Imran."[26]

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[22] See "Nestorius, Nestorianism," in *EDT*, 823–24. See also, "Nestorius" in *Dictionary of Christian Church,* F.L. Cross & E.A. Livingstone, eds. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickon Publishers, 2007), 1138–39.

[23] Richard Bell, *The Origin of Islam,* 24–5.

[24] Clinton Bennett, *Understanding Christian-Muslim Relations: Past and Present* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2008), 77.

[25] Ibn Ishāq, *Sīrat Rasūl Allāh,* 270–1.

[26] Ibid., 272.

The Jacobites. In 451 the Council of Chalcedon affirmed the doctrine of the two natures of Christ as a response toward Eutychianism which taught that the Incarnate Christ has only one nature and that nature was not "consubstantial with us."[27] The term "monophysitism" was later given to those who refused to accept the Chalcedon definition. Eutychianism was advanced by Jacob Baradeus; henceforth, his followers were known as the Jacobites and, subsequently, the Syriac Orthodox Church. Baradeus was elected as the bishop of Edessa in 542. He continued the work of Eutyches in Mesopotamia and spent about fifteen years in Constantinople. William Montgomery Watt in *Muslim–Christian Encounters* alleges that, along with Nestorianism, the Jacobites exhibited great influence in Mecca prior to the emergence of Islam.These erroneous Christian groups were apparently unsuccessful in capturing the subtleties of Orthodox Christian doctrine.[28] Similarly, Ghada Osman contends that though there were some communities of Christians in Mecca and Medina, they continued to be isolated from other Orthodox Christians, and therefore, remained unaware of the true biblical teachings.[29]

Christianity in Najrān

Since two out of four individuals presented in this section were from Najrān, it is necessary to provide some brief information about this city located in Yemen, South Arabia, in relation to the history of the existence of its Christian community. Shahid

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[27] "Monophysitism," in *DCC*, 110405.

[28] William M. Watt, *Muslim-Christian Encounters: Perceptions and Misperceptions* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 6–7.

[29] Ghada Osman, "Pre-Islamic Arab Converts to Christianity in Mecca and Medina: An Investigation into Arabic Sources," in *The Muslim World* 95 (Jan 2005), 67–80.

asserts that a merchant from Najrān by the name of Hayyān brought Christianity to his city after visiting Constantinople. Hayyān, who was later converted to Christianity in Hīra, received some support from Byzantium in his efforts to evangelize Najrān.[30] Based on the date of this conversion, the early fifth century, Shahid argues that although various denominations of Christianity existed, Monophysitism[31] was undoubtedly the predominant one.[32]

The city of Najrān later became known as the "city of the Arab martyrs."[33] The reason for associating Najrān with the Arab martyrs involved an event that took place in 520 when King Himyar Dhū Nuwās of Judea decided to conquer this city and kill its inhabitants for refusing to deny their Christian faith.[34] Approximately 20,000 Christians in Najrān were burned to death by soldiers of Dhū Nuwās.[35] The Roman Empire under Justin I responded to this attack by sending troops from Ethiopia to free the Nadjrānites

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[30] Irfan Shahid, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century*, vol. 1, part 1 (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks, 1995), 510–1.

[31] The teaching of Eutyches (d. 454) that the Incarnate Christ has only one nature, which is the divine one, was condemned at the Council of Chalcedon in 451. This heretical teaching was also known as Eutychianism, after its teacher Eutyches. It represented Alexandrian Christology. See D.A. Hubbard, "Monophysitism" in *EDT*, 788. See also "Monophysitism" in the *DCC*, 1104–05.

[32] Shahid, *Byzantium and the Arabs,* Appendix B.

[33] Irfan Shahid, *Byzantium and the Arabs*, 330. Shahid also called Najrān as the "Holy City of Christian Arabs." See Shahid, *Byzantium,* 434.

[34] Irfan Shahid, "Nadjrān," in *EI2.*

[35] Robert Brenton Betts, *The Sunni-Shi'a Divide: Islam's Internal Divisions and Their Global Consequences* (Dulles, Virginia: Potomac Books, 2013), 6.

from Himyar in 525. For the next fifty years, Najrān enjoyed its golden era and became the pilgrimage center for Christians in the Arabian Peninsula.[36]

The spread of Islam in the seventh and eighth centuries eventually reached the border of Arabia and began to penetrate predominately Christian areas. Wadi Z. Haddad explains, "Parallel to developments of Islamic jurisprudence and law and the exegetical literature of the Qur'ān, a polemic literature arose that specifically addressed Christian doctrines."[37] It appears that the Islamic doctrine was most likely shaped by external influences, and not merely from the revelation to Muhammad as claimed by Muslims. The following section will present the encounters Muhammad experienced with Christians that will show how the Muslim prophet received and built his understanding of Christian theology.

Muhammad's Encounter with Christians

In his introduction to *Christian Muslim Relations*, David Thomas argues that the certainty of what Muhammad knew about Christianity and its teachings remains unclear.[38] Giulio Basett-Sani also presents a similar assertion claiming that this task is not an easy one.[39] After presenting his thorough research, this Franciscan scholar concurred:

> It is also well to remember that the Christians of Arabia in Mohammed's time were mostly individual men without a following, who had preserved very little of authentic Christianity. We should not look for true, organized, Christian

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[36] Betts, *The Sunni-Shi'a Divide*, 6.

[37] Wadi Z. Haddad, "A Tenth-Century Speculative Theologian's Refutation of the Basic Doctrines of Christianity: al-Bāqillānī," in *Christian Muslim Encounters.* Yvonne Y. Haddad and Wadi Z. Haddad, eds. (Jacksonville: University Press of Florida, 1995), 82.

[38] David Thomas, *Introduction in Christian-Muslim Relations*, 2.

[39] Giulio Basett-Sani, *The Koran in the Light of Christ* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press: 1977), 138–9.

> communities with bishops and priests, at least not in Mecca or Medina where Christians were probably rather ignorant and careless about their faith.[40]

Moreover, Bassett-Sani gives a different perspective on who the "people of the book" were as referenced in the Qur'ān. Based on the context and interpretation from several verses of the Qur'ān, he argues that this term refers to "Jewish learned men, to rabbis or Scribes" since sometimes the Qur'ān would make it explicit references to Christians.[41]

Regarding Bassett-Sani's position above, general Islamic studies scholars would maintain that two sources can be used to trace Muhammad's encounter with Christians: the qur'ānic verses dealing with Christians and the writings from early Muslim historians. The significance of these encounters remains important since they demonstrate some Muslim understanding about Christianity and its doctrine. Several qur'ānic verses contribute to the Muslim's perception and attitude towards Christianity in early Islam: Sūrah 5:17, 5:72–73, and 5:82.[42] Historians discuss four Christians who encountered Muhammad during the prophet's lifetime: Monk Bahīrā, Bishop Quss ibn Sa'īda al-Iyādī of Najrān, Waraqa ibn Nawfal, and Abū Hāritha ibn Alqāma of Najrān.[43] One should understand that the Christianity encountered by Muhammad and his followers in the seventh century did not necessarily have the same views of Christianity held today.

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[40] Bassett-Sani, *The Koran*, 139–41.

[41] Ibid.

[42] This fifth chapter of the Qur'ān is named *Al-Ma'idah* and included in one of the Medinan sūrahs.

[43] C. Jonn Block, *The Qur'an in Christian Muslim Dialogue: Historical and Modern Interpretations* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 25.

Monk Bahīrā. The account of a monumental meeting between the young Muhammad and a Nestorian monk named Bahīrā is ubiquitous in Islamic history.[44] Numerous writers base this assertion on two reliable sources in Islamic history. The first one is *Sīra* by Ibn Ishāq, and the second one is *The History of al-Tabarī* (*Ta'rīkh al-rusul wa'l mulūk*) by Abū Ja'far Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī. Some differences between these two accounts raise questions about the accuracy of the information provided by these historians.

Ibn Ishāq explains that young Muhammad frequently traveled with his uncle, Abū Tālib, a Meccan trader. Muhammad's encounter with Bahīrā, a monk "who was well versed in the knowledge of Christians" occurred in Busrā, Syria.[45] The monk, after seeing the "seal of prophethood between his shoulders," warned Abū Tālib to "take your nephew back to his country and guard him carefully against the Jews, for by Allah, if they see him and know about him what I know, they will do him evil; a great future lies before this nephew of yours, so take him home quickly."[46] Abū Tālib went home and did as he was instructed to do.

However, Al-Tabarī provides minor differences when narrating this particular event, and one of them deals with the cloud that overshadowed Muhammad in Busrā. The cloud, according to al-Tabarī, not only "marked him out from the company," but also

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[44] The Center for the Study of Christianity of the University of Jerusalem provides no less than 30 scholarly works discussing the account of Bahīrā and Muhammad. [on-line]; accessed on May 13, 2016; available from http://www.csc.org.il/db/browse.aspx?db=sb&sL=B&sK=Bahira&sT=keywords; Internet.

[45] Ibn Ishāq, *Sīrat Rasūl Allāh,* 79. See also Yar-Shater, *The History of al-Tabarī*, 44.

[46] Ibn Ishāq, *Sīrat Rasūl Allāh,* 81. See also Martin Lings, *Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources* (New York: Inner Traditions International, Ltd. 1983), 29–30.

"covering the tree and bending down its branches over the Messenger of God until he was in the shade beneath it."[47] Similar to Ibn Ishāq, al-Tabarī also described Bahīrā's warning to Abū Tālib about the possibility of Jews killing Muhammad.

Although details in Ibn Ishāq's account remain noteworthy, in 1889 Richard J. H. Gottheil published an article, conveying valuable insights by comparing the Arabic and Syriac version of the Bahīrā legend.[48] However, this important work was overlooked by Christian scholars, which led Sidney Griffith to review this article as an "exercise in Christian literary apologetics."[49]

Trimingham also supplies an excellent historical background concerning this account in his book *Christianity Among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times.* Trimingham argues that since the Syriac word *bhīrā* refers to a title, "reverend," this could be any monk.[50] One should understand that the contact between the people of Mecca and the Christians of Syria through commercial trade was quite common for Pre-Islamic Arabs.

The account provided by Ibn Ishāq introduces some problems regarding the identification of Bahīrā as a Christian, or even as a Nestorian. First, Ibn Ishāq maintained that Bahīrā "gained his knowledge from a book kept in the cell, so they allege, handed

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[47] Ehsan Yar-Shater, ed. *The History of al-Tabarī*, vol. VI, trans. by William Montgomery Watt and M. V. McDonald (New York: State University of New York Press), 456.

[48] Richard J.H. Gottheil, "A Syriac Baḥîrâ Legend," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 13 (1889): clxxvii-clxxxi. Gottheil contends there are at least nine known extant Arabic manuscripts.

[49] Sidney Harrison Griffith, "Muhammad and the Monk Bahîrâ: Reflections on a Syriac and Arabic Text from Early Abbasid Times," *Oriens Christianus* 79 (1995): 146–174. See also Sidney H. Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque: Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 80–1. Griffith believes that the good and true teachings of Qur'ān and Islam were the results of Bahīrā's teaching to Muhammad.

[50] Trimingham, *Christianity Among the Arabs*, 258–59. Although Muslim historians mostly support this account, it is not the case with non-Muslim scholars.

down from generation to generation."[51] Then he also claimed he was trying " . . . to find traces of his description (in the Christian books)."[52] Although it is unclear to which Christian books he was referring, it appears that the confirmation of Muhammad's prophethood came from Christian teachings.[53] However, a careful reading of this account demonstrates inconsistency in using the singular and plural form of "book" in this section. Second, Ibn Ishāq recorded that Bahīrā came to Muhammad and greeted him in the name of *al-Lāt* and *al-'Uzzā* since "he had heard his people swearing by these gods."[54] It is problematic to accept that a Christian monk would swear by the name of pagan gods.

Bishop Quss ibn Sa'īda al-Iyādī of Najrān. Known as Bishop Quss, he frequently preached in the market of Ukāz where Muhammad, fascinated by his sermons, enjoyed listening to him.[55] Just like the account of Bāhīra, the story of Muhammad and Quss can be found in many classical Arabic works. Marek M. Dziekan even refers to him as the "Arabic and Islamic cultural hero," in his brief article about this Yemeni bishop.[56]

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[51] Ibn Ishāq, *Sīrat Rasūl Allāh,* 79.

[52] Ibid., 80.

[53] *al-Tabarī* claims that Bahīrā, after carefully observing Muhammad, found "features of his person whose description he had found in his book." See Yar-Shater, *The History of al-Tabarī*, 45. Muslims often use Sūrah 5:91 to support this claim: "O People of the Book! Now hath come unto you, making (things) clear unto you, Our Messenger, after the break in (the series of) our messengers, lest ye should say: "There came unto us no bringer of glad tidings and no warner (from evil)": But now hath come unto you a bringer of glad tidings and a warner (from evil). And Allah hath power over all things." In addition to this verse, Muslims also quote Sūrah 6:84–90 as the evidence of Muhammad's prophethood.

[54] Ibn Ishāq, *Sīrat Rasūl Allāh,* 80.

[55] Block, *The Qur'ān in Christian Muslim Dialogue,* 25.

[56] Marek M. Dziekan, "Quss Ibn Sa'ida al-Iyadi (6th-7th Cent. A.D.), Bishop of Najran an Arabic and Islamic Cultural Hero," in *Studia Ceranea 2* (2012): 127–35.

Charles Pellat describes Quss as "the greatest orator of all the tribes . . . and whose eloquence has become proverbial . . . He is also an heroic figure, describing as being also the poet, sage, judge, etc. par excellence of the Arabs of his time."[57] Admiration towards a Christian bishop is almost unheard of in the Islamic tradition. This most likely occurred due to the alleged influence on Muhammad's life. There are two significant items of interest about Quss in this dissertation: first, Islamic tradition holds that Quss was the first monotheist in the time of the Prophet who believed in the resurrection;[58] and second, the Shī'ah believe that he was the one who foretold the coming of the twelve imāms.[59]

Waraqa ibn Nawfal. Waraqa ibn Nawfal played a significant role in Muhammad's early spiritual journey. He was the cousin of Muhammad's wealthy and first wife, Khadija. Trimingham asserts that Waraqa was one of the four *hanīfs* who became a Christian.[60] Ibn Ishāq concurred that Waraqa "attached himself to Christianity and studied its Scripture until he had thoroughly mastered them."[61] *Sahih Muslim* alleges that Waraqa "used to write books in Arabic, and, therefore, wrote *Injil* (Gospel) in Arabic as God willed that he should write."[62] However, this allegation remains questionable since the earliest extant Arabic translation of the Gospels is from the eighth century.[63]

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[57] Charles Pellat, "Kuss Ibn Sā'ida al-Iyādī," in *EI2*, 528—29.

[58] Ibid.

[59] Dziekan, "Quss Ibn Sa'ida al-Iyadi," in *EI2*, 127–35.

[60] Trimingham, *Christianity Among the Arabs,* 263. The other three *hanīfs* were: Zaid ibn 'Amr ibn Nufail, 'Ubaid Allāh ibn Jahsh, and 'Uthman ibn al-Huwairith.

[61] Ibn Ishāq, *Sīrat Rasūl Allāh,* 99.

[62] Imām Muslim, *Sahih Muslim* (Lahore, Pakistan: Ashraf Press), 98.

[63] F. L. Cross and Elizabeth A. Livingstone, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church,* 3rd ed. rev. (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 96. See also David Thomas,

Watt challenges the accuracy of Ibn Ishāq's information and contends that Ibn Nawfal was only familiar with the Bible in Syriac and possibly "had had it read to him," probably because he was blind [64]

Abū Hāritha ibn Alqāma of Najrān. Although the research on the name of Abū Hāritha in the Islamic literature brings little results, the encounter between Muhammad and the people of Najrān led by Abū Hāritha is not an insignificant event in Islamic history. In fact, the political discussion between the two parties that later on became a theological confrontation resulting in the revelation of several verses in the third chapter of the Qur'ān or Sūrah *Al-Imran*. This event is later known as *Eid al-Mubāhalah*, or "the event of mutual imprecation."[65]

In 632 when the Prophet lived in Medina, he received a delegation from Najrān led by three important men: Abd al-Masīh, Abū Hāritha, and as-Sayyid ibn Al-Harīth.[66] The purpose of this visit involved ensuring that Muhammad and his army would not intervene in the religious life and the property of the people of Najrān, as the latter would

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"Introduction" in *Christian-Muslim Relations. A Bibliographical History* Vol 1 (600-900), 18. See also Alfred Guillaume, "The Version of the Gospels Used in Medina Circa 700 AD," in *Christmas in the Koran: Luxenberg, Syriac and the Near Easter and Judeo-Christian Background of Islam*, Ibn Warraq, ed. (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2014), 607–12.

[64] Watt, *Muslim-Christian Encounters*, 6. See also Block, *The Qur'ān*, 25. Watt also questions the reliability of this account since the details come from various versions; he avers, " . . . it would seem that Muhammad must have had some external assurance from a qualified person that his experience was comparable to those of Moses; those of Jesus were also mentioned at some point."

[65] If any one disputes in this matter with thee, now after (full) knowledge Hath come to thee, say: "Come! let us gather together,- our sons and your sons, our women and your women, ourselves and yourselves: Then let us earnestly pray, and invoke the curse of Allah on those who lie!"

[66] Watt, *Muhammad at Medina*, 127.

agree to pay tribute to the Muslim community.[67] Abū Hāritha and the other two men would politely refuse Muhammad's invitation to embrace the Islamic faith mainly because the people of Najrān did not want to deny the deity of Jesus.

Abū Hāritha belonged to Banu Al-Hārith ibn Ka'b, an Arab tribe of Yemen known as Balhārith.[68] The reason Abū Hāritha received more attention than the other two in this account was not only because he was the religious leader, but also because he was an Arab who embraced Christianity, having received a high position and financial support from the Romans. Commenting on Abū Hāritha's refusal to embrace the faith of Muhammad, Muhammad Husayn Haykal, a Muslim historian from Egypt, described Abū Hāritha as someone who has a "materialistic ambition for wealth, worldly prestige and social eminence."[69]

The Death of Muhammad and Early Muslim's Schism

The death of the Prophet Muhammad in 632 launched the dilemma concerning who should legitimately inherit the leadership in Islam. Khalīd Yahya Blankinship points out that determining Muhammad's successor was "one of the most contentious and difficult in Muslim history."[70] Since Muhammad's companions unanimously agreed that

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[67] Ibid. Watt continues to explain that the Najrāns finally agreed to send 2,000 garments annually and would lend 30 horses and 30 camels whenever a Muslim army became engaged in a war.

[68] See "Al-Harith b. Ka'b," in *EI2*.

[69] Muhammad Husayn Haykal, *The Life of Muhammad*, translated by Ismaīl Rāgī al Fārūqī (Philadelphia: North American Trust Publications, 1976), 197. See C Jonn Block "The Treaty of Muhammad with the Najrān Christians" in *The Qur'ān in Christian-Muslim Dialogue: Historical and Modern Interpretations* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 58–9.

[70] Khalid Yahya Blankinship, "Imārah, Khilāfah, and Imāmah: The Originis of the Succession to the Prophet Muhammad," in *Shi'ite Heritage: Essays on Classical and Modern Traditions* (Binghamton, NY: Global Publications, 2001), 19. Hamid Mavani refers to this as "a major crisis of authority and

the revelation of the Holy Book concluded with the death of the Prophet, there was no need to recognize another prophet after Muhammad.[71] Three groups within the Muslim community affirmed their right to propose their leader to be the successor of the Prophet: the *Muhājirūn*, the *Ansār*, and the Legitimists.[72] Furthermore, they believed that the caliph should come exclusively from the tribe of Quraysh. Referring to what is known as the "Farewell Pilgrimage" at Ghadīr Khumm, the Shī'ah concur that Muhammad, who was aware of the end of his ministry, had actually explicitly introduced Àlī as his successor to the Muslim community.[73] The Shī'ah also argue that " . . . it is not conceivable that the Prophet should have died without appointing someone as his successor, without having selected a guide and leader to direct the affairs of Muslims and to turn the wheels of Islamic society."[74] While not denying the historicity of the event at Ghadīr Khumm, the Sunnis rejected that proposition because they believed the Qur'ān clearly spoke about this matter and directed selection of their leaders based on a

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leadership" following the death of Muhammad, see Hamid Mavani, *Religious Authority and Political Thought in Twelver Shi'ism: From Àlī to Post-Khomeini* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 1.

[71] This is the reason Muslims reject the Ahmadiyya, a sect in Islam that holds Mirza Ghulam Ahmad of India as the last Prophet. According to the Orthodox Muslims, Ahmadiyya violates the very doctrine of the Prophethood of Muhammad. In the 19th century Ghulam Ahmad claimed that he received revelation from God and performed miracles. He also declared that he was the Mahdi, the returned Jesus, as well as the re-appearance of Muhammad. See Juan E Campo, "Ahmadiyya" in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 23–4.

[72] *Muhājirūn*, or Emigrants, were the first followers of Muhammad who migrated from Mecca to Medina in 622 to avoid persecution. This event became known as *hijra*, or emigration, and is remembered by Muslims all over the world every year. See Juan E Campo, "Emigrants," in *EI*, 213. *Ansar*, or helpers, were Arabs who have converted to Islam from Medina. See Campo, "Ansar," in *Encyclopedia of Islam,* 45. The third group, the Legitimists, mostly consisted of Àlī's supporters.

[73] Mavani, *Religious Authority*, 1. Mavani explains that this is an "incontrovertible proof, testament, and explicit evidence." See also Arjomand, *The Shaddow of God*, 41.

[74] Tabātabā'ī, 'Allāmah Sayyid Muhammad Husayn. *Shi'te Islam*, trans. and ed. by Seyyed Hossein Nasr (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1975), 175.

consensus of the community (*ijmā*).[75]

The early Muslims were politically divided into two major factions which have continued into the present, namely: Shī'ah and Sunni. This first division in the Muslim community in early Islamic history ensued from immeasurable partisan struggles that formed the political and theological landscape within Islam. Not only were the early Muslims politically divided, they also differed theologically resulting in the emergence of several theological camps such as: the Mu'tazīlīte,[76] the Qadarīs, and the Murji'a.[77] While the reason behind the political division was the issue of legitimate leadership of the Muslim community, the theological factors that separated them were caused by disagreements over matters concerning God and the afterlife.[78]

Four Caliphs

The process of selecting the next leader to succeed such a charismatic figure as Muhammad was no easy task for the early Muslim community since the prophet himself,

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[75] Mavani, *Religious Authority,* 1. See also Newman, Andrew J. *Twelver Shiism: Unity and Diversity in the Life of Islam, 632 to 1722* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 2.

[76] The founder of Mu'tazīlīte was Wāsil ibn-'Atā who, because of his disagreement with his teacher, al-Hasan al-Basri, withdrew from his teaching. The word Mu'tazīlīte itself means "those who seceded," refer to the students who shared ibn-'Atā's view. The Mu'tazīlītes were known for their "Five Principles," namely: 1) God's unity and uniqueness, 2) His justice, 3) the eternity of Paradise for the righteous and hell for sinners, 4) the intermediate state of the Muslim sinner, and 5) the command to enjoin goodness and to forbid iniquity. However, they were mostly known for their stand on the existence of the Qur'ān, arguing that since God's Book was subordinate to God, thus the Qur'ān was created by God, a position challenged by early Sunnis. See Khalid Blankinship, "The Early Creed," in *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*. Tim Winter, ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 47–51. See also Farah, *Islam,* 208–10.

[77] The political struggles and civil wars resulted in the early Muslim community having numerous theological debates, one of which involved the judgment of God upon ungodly leaders. This particular group concluded that the Muslim community should defer, or postpone (*murji'a*) judgment by leaving it to God. Hence, they were known as the Murji'ites. See "Murji'tes" in *EI2*.

[78] Blankinship, "The Early Creed," in *CCCIT*, 35.

according to non-Shī'ah writers, had not designated anyone to be his successor.[79] In the midst of their internal conflicts, for nearly the next thirty years, the Islam community was ruled by four caliphs known as the Rashidun Caliphates (*al-Khilāfah ar-Rāshidah)*, or the "Rightly Guided." These four caliphs not only functioned as rulers but also held a responsibility as the "commander of the faithful" (*amīr al-mu'minīn*).[80]

Abū Bakr 'Abdallāh bin Abī Quḥāfah aṣ-Ṣiddīq. The Quraysh were in favor of bringing Abū Bakr as the first Caliph while the Ansār of Medina preferred Àlī to be their first leader. Two years after the death of Muhammed, Abū Bakr was elected as the first Caliph. This decision probably occurred due to the fact that Muhammad ordered him to lead the Muslims in prayers while the prophet was sick.[81] He was undoubtedly one of the most important supporters of Muhammad. His role in protecting the Prophet during the *Hijra* to Medina and his confirmation on Muhammad's special journey to the heaven were significant, in addition to his heroic deeds in the many battles he fought. In spite of their disappointment, Àlī followers pledged their commitment to support Abū Bakr's leadership.[82]

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[79] Most of non-Shī'ah writers or literatures would agree with this claim, for example Gerhard Endress, *Islam: An Historical Introduction*, 2nd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 33. Farah even refers to the selection of Abū Bakr as the caliph done by "the faithful in democratic council." See Farah, *Islam*, 154; Helmut Gatje, *The Qur'an and Its Exegesis: Selected Texts with Classical and Modern Muslim Interpretations* (Oxford, England: Oneworld Publication, 1996), 13.

[80] Farah, *Islam*, 154–5.

[81] Wilfred Madelung, *The Succession to Muhammad* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 1.

[82] Momen points out that this claim has never been agreed by Shī'ah historians since there is indication that Àlī's decision to support Abū Bakr was made under a threat. Both parties pledged to mobilize their armed men. Àlī understood that the Islamic community would have engaged in civil war if he kept pursuing the office. See Mojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shìi Islam: The History and Doctrines of the Twelver Shìism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 18–22.

The Muslim community experienced a golden momentum under the leadership of Abū Bakr. For the first time they could expand their territory beyond the Arabian Peninsula, bringing Iraq and Syria under their conquest. Another important achievement of Abū Bakr took place when he assigned Zayd the responsibility of codifying the Qur'ān.[83] Abū Bakr died of sickness with his reign lasting only two years. Just before his death Abū Bakr designated Umar ibn Khattab as the next Caliph, a decision unpopular among the caliphs.

Umar ibn al-Khattāb. Umar was known for his loyalty to Muhammad and also to his predecessor, Abū Bakr. He was Muhammad's former opponent who not only embraced Islam but also gave his daughter, Hafsa, to become one of Muhammad's wives.[84] The *Sīra* narrates Umar's hostility towards Muhammad and Islam prior to his conversion and claims that "Umar's [conversion to] Islam was a victory; his migration to Medina was a help; and his government was a divine mercy."[85] Several accomplishments in this new empire were credited to Umar. The first involved the fact that Islamic territory advanced even further under his leadership into Egypt and Iraq.[86] This territorial expansion demanded a governing structure. Umar also played an influential role in

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[83] Farah, *Islam*, 98.

[84] Gibbs, Hamilton and J. H. Kramers, eds. "Umar ibn Al-Khattab" in *Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1953), 600–1.

[85] Ibn Ishāq, *Sīrat Rasūl Allāh,* 155–59.

[86] Juan L. Esposito, "'Umar ibn al-Khattāb," in *EI.* See also Albert Hourani, *A History of the Arab People* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 23.

establishing the necessary political structure for the Islamic state.[87] Third, he instituted the use of the Islamic Calendar and the office of judge.[88] Tragically, on November 23, 644 Umar's life came to an end at the hands of a Christian slave of al-Mughīra, the governor of Basra.[89]

Muslim historians and legal theorists attributed the series of regulations that governed formal relations with Christians and other People of the Book to the second Caliph Ùmar ibn al-Khattāb. He laid down the conditions for the capitulation of cities taken over by his generals.[90] The most notable one was the legend of the capture of Jerusalem. Umar demonstrated a tolerance by assuring the safety of the Christians and churches in Jerusalem.[91]

Úthmān ibn Affān. The political tension in the Muslim's leadership culminated when Úthmān was chosen as the third caliph. If the first two caliphs were known for their strict piety, Úthmān's leadership was notorious for nepotism and materialism.[92] His demeanor caused a rivalry between Muhammad's son-in-laws: Àlī and Úthmān. The former took Fatimah as his wife, while the latter married Ruqayyah and

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[87] Cyril Glassé, "Umar ibn al-Khattab," in *The New Encyclopedia of Islam*. Rev. Ed. (New York: Altamira Press, 2001), 461–62.

[88] Chase F. Robinson, ed. *The New Cambridge History of Islam, Vol 1, The Formation of the Islamic World Sixth to Eleventh Centuries* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 208.

[89] Gibb, *SEI*, 601.

[90] David Thomas, *Christian-Muslim Relations,* 5.

[91] Hugh Kennedy, *The Great Arab Conquest: How the Spread of Islam Changed the World We Live In* (Boston: Da Capo Press, 2007), 90–3.

[92] Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam*, 21.

Umm Kulthūm.[93] These three women were Muhammad's daughters from his wife Khadijah.[94]

Despite his opposition, Úthmān advanced the Muslim empire with several accomplishments including dividing the empire into twelve provinces and assigning each a governor. This division of power protected them from any Byzantine invasion. His most notable success dealt with finalizing the unified version of the Qur'ān, which is most widely known as the Úthmānic Codex.[95] After ruling the Muslims for twelve years, Úthmān was brutally murdered at the age of eighty-two in his home on June 16, 656.[96]

Àlī ibn Abū Tālīb. Àlī, Muhammad's own cousin, has been attributed as the Prophet's first conversion to the Muslim faith. His father, Abū Tālib, Muhammad's uncle, was a central figure in the life of the Prophet. Abū Tālib raised Muhammad as his own son. He fully supported the Prophet's journey in spreading Islam. Abū Tālib then entrusted his son, Àlī, to Muhammad's custody, perhaps due to the famine in Mecca.[97] Àlī became extremely loyal to the Prophet, even willing to sacrifice himself to protect him. His marriage to Fatimah produced three prominent distinctions in relation to the Prophet as he became a cousin, son-in-law, and the first Muslim convert. Àlī's followers elevated him with the highest regard claiming that "Àlī is never separated from the Truth

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[93] Gibb, *SEI,* 601. Úthmān took Umm Kulthūm as his wife after Ruqayyah died during the Badr campaign.

[94] Al-Tabarī, Vol XV, 254–5.

[95] Esposito, "Uthmān ibn Affān," in *EI,* 500.

[96] Although Islamic historians vary as to the year of his death, they all agree it happened during *Dhū al-Jijjah* (the last month in Islamic calendar), See Al-Tabarī, Vol XV, 250–51.

[97] Tabãtabã'ī, *Shi'ite Islam,* 191.

nor the Truth from Àlī."[98] With the viewpoint that the successor of the Prophet should be from the "people of the household" (*Ahl al-bayt*), Àlī's followers (*Shī'ah Alī*) asserted that due to his special relationship with the Prophet, Àlī should be the only one qualified for this position.[99] In all likelihood, the Shī'ah favored the selection of Àlī as leader of the Muslims based on their interpretation of Sūrah 5:55.[100]

One of the most influential Iranian theologians who published more than 80 works, Ayatollah Ja'far Sobhani, maintained that numerous hadiths, according to the Shī'ah, proved Muhammad had appointed Àlī to be his successor. Muhammad himself, Sobhani claims, "who under divine guidance, and by means of repeated declarations, planted the seed of Shīism in the hearts of his companions, and gradually cultivated this seed . . . ." [*sic*][101] Therefore, for the Shī'ah, Àlī not only became the true caliph but also the first imām.

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[98] Ibid., 192. *Ghulat* literally means "extremists" or "exaggerators." It refers to a Shī'ah sect that venerates Álī, or other imāms, with divine qualities. See Cyril Glassé, "Ghulat" in *The New Encyclopedia of Islam.* rev. ed. (New York: Altamira Press, 2001), 156. Matti Moosa allegedly claims the Ghulat's Trinity in Islam consists of God, Muhammad, and Àlī. Moosa, *Extremist Shiites*, 5. Marshall G. S. Hogsdon suggests that the term was first used by the later Twelver Shī'ah who claimed to be moderates. Hogsdon provides an excellent overview on the origination of this term in his article, "How Did the Early Shī'a become Sectarian?" *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol 75, no. 1 (1955), 1–13.

[99] Farhad Daftary, *The Isma'ilis: Their History and Doctrines* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990) 38–9. Concerning the qualification of Àlī, Daftary explains, "in the eyes of the Shī'ah Àlī's unique qualification as successor held yet another important dimension in that he was believed to have been nominated by divine command (*amr*) as expressed through the Prophet's testament. This meant that Àlī was also divinely inspired and immune from error and sin (*ma'sum*), thus making him infallible both in his knowledge and as a teaching authority after the Prophet."

[100] "Your (real) friends are (no less than) Allah, His Messenger, and the (fellowship of) believers,- those who establish regular prayers and regular charity, and they bow down humbly (in worship)."

[101] Sobhani provides no less than five *hadīth* to prove his argument, such as *Hadith Yawm al-Dar* (The Day of the Home), *Hadith al-Manzila* (The Spiritual Rank), *Hadith al-Safina* (The Ark), *Hadith Aman-al-umma* (Security of the community), and *Hadith al-Thaqalayn* (The Two Precious Things). Ayatollah Ja'far Sobhani. *Doctrines of Shìi Islam: A Compendium of Imami Beliefs and Practices*, trans. and ed. by Reza Shah-Kazemi (New York: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 2001), 98–104.

After waiting for almost 35 years, Àlī's followers finally gained what they wanted, the election of Àlī as Caliph. In spite of the accusation for being the perpetrator behind Úthman's assassination, Àlī was chosen as the fourth caliph in 656. He led the Muslim community in what Amir-Moezzi refers as "one of the most troubled periods of the Muslim community" after the murder of his two predecessors.[102] He ruled for four years and nine months before being murdered by one of the Khārajites in the mosque of Kufa, Iraq, in 661.[103] Thus, Àlī's death ended the period of the Rashidun Caliphate. In the eyes of Shī'ah, Àlī's short rule of only 6 years "remained at once celestial and symbolic, ethical and exemplary for the rest of Shī'ah history a sacrosanct model always to be emulated but never to be attained."[104] The Muslim community chose Mu'āwiyah as the next caliph who then founded the Umayyad Caliphate.[105]

The Defining Islamic Political Struggle

If the time following the death of Muhammad was known as "one of the most contentious and difficult in Muslim history" as stated by Blankinship, the situation following the death of Àlī was even more dramatic and tragic than before the Four Caliphs ruled.[106] As the struggle with the political and theological issues coalesced, the

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[102] Amir Moezzi, *The Divine Guide*, 63.

[103] The History of al-Tabarī, Vol XVII, 227. *Khārajites*, or *Khawārij*, were actually Àlī's supporters who were disappointed with the Caliph's decision to have arbitration with Mu'āwiyah following the battle of Siffīn. See Farah, *Islam*, 175–77.

[104] Dabashi, *Shi'ism,* 61.

[105] Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples*, 25–31.

[106] Khalid Yahya Blankinship, "Imārah, Khilāfah, and Imāmah: The Origins of the Succession to the Prophet Muhammad" in *Shi'ite Heritage: Essays on Classical and Modern Traditions* (Binghamton,

tensions between the Sunni and the *Ahl al-bayt* grew even worse under the next Sunni Caliph, Mu'āwiyah, and his successors. It would probably be accurate to refer to the time of the Four Caliphs as the Rashidun Caliphates considering the aftermath in Islamic polity.

The Umayyad Caliphate

Mu'āwiyah was a member of the most prominent and wealthiest family of the Quraish tribe, Umayyad. He was the governor of Syria and the cousin of the third caliph, Úthmān.[107] Mu'āwiyah refused to accept the leadership of Àlī, blaming the latter as responsible for the murder of Úthmān.[108] Muslim historians believe that Mu'āwiyah was behind the assassination of Àlī by ordering someone to poison the fourth caliph. He immediately became the caliph after the death of Àlī. Before Mu'āwiyah died in 680, he changed the caliphate system into a dynasty by naming his son, Yazīd, as his successor.[109]

The Ummayad Dynasty became known for running the Muslim empire for their own benefit as each of the caliphates ruled heinously with a dictatorial bent. Behaviors of some of the caliphs commonly found during the pagan age, included lifestyles exhibiting drunkenness and immorality. Despite the negative impressions, the Umayyads achieved numerous accomplishments during their short reign. For example,

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NY: Global Publications, 2001), 19. Hamid Mavani refers to this time as "a major crisis of authority and leadership" following the death of Muhammad, see Mavani, *Religious*, 1.

[107] Juan E. Campo, "Umayyad Caliphs," in *EI*, 686–87.

[108] Momen, *Shi'i Islam*, 24.

[109] Juan E. Campo, *EI*, 687.

Arabic became the official language of the Muslim empire. The most significant aspect of this period was the assimilation of the Arabs as the conquerors and the non-Arabs as the conquered into one Islamic society.[110] After fourteen caliphs ruled the Islamic community for about 90 years, the Umayyad Dynasty was overthrown in 750. The next administration was called the Abbāsid Caliphate.

The Twelve Imāms and the Divisions of the Major Shī'ah Sects

The foundation of Shī'ah doctrine and political ideology established during the reign of their twelve imāms lasted from roughly 661 to 941. While all imāms were supposedly equally venerated, there were some who seemed more important than others. For example, Àlī, Husayn, and the Mahdi received more honor than the others because of the significance of their leadership. In theological importance, however, Imām Ja'far, the sixth imām, was known as the one who laid the foundation of Shī'ah theology, hence known as the Ja'fari school.

The Twelve Imāms

The section below provides a brief history of these twelve imāms and the significance of their imāmates in the history of Shī'ah. Along with their history, this section will include the three main branches of Shī'ah: the Zaydiyyah, the Isma'īli, and the Twelvers. Also, readers will find the importance of the Karbala War during the leadership of Imām Husayn and the significance of *Āshūrā* in the life of Shī'ah. It remains imperative to remember that the enmity between Shī'ah and the Mu'āwiyah violently increased following the death of Àlī.

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[110] L. Molina, "Umayyads" in *EI2.* See also "Ummayad," in *The New Encyclopedia of Islam.*

The First Imām – Àlī ibn Abū Talīb. Àlī took responsibility for leading the Muslim community during the most troubled times in the history of Islam following the assassinations of his two predecessors, Umar and Úthmān. During his short reign, Àlī faced several significant civil wars with Muslims opposing his leadership, including one from Aisha, Muhammad's favorite wife, in the Battle of Camel of 656. Along with Aisha, two Muslim generals, Talhah and Zubayrs, revolted against Àlī after accusing the fourth Caliph of being the one behind the murder of Úthmān.[111] Following this battle, in 657 Àlī encountered the Battle of Siffin against the Mu'āwiyah with the latter charging the Caliph for the murder of Úthmān. Mu'āwiyah pleaded for arbitration knowing that Àlī's troops would defeat them. Àlī's decision to accept this mediation cost him his life after one of the Khārajites murdered him on 27 January 661.[112]

The significance of Àlī in Shī'ah doctrine can be found in one of the Shī'ah traditions attributed to Muhammad, which exalted the Prophet and Àlī almost to the point of deifying them. The tradition declares, "God created Àlī and me from one light before the creation of Adam . . . then He split (the light) into two halves, then He created (all) things from my light and Àlī's light."[113]

The Second Imām – Abū Muhammad Hasan ibn Àlī. Hasan, the oldest son of Àlī and Fatimah who, according to *Al-Kāfi*, was born in the month of Ramadhan three

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[111] Dabashi, *Shi'ism*, 108–9. The reason Muslims named this war the Battle of Camel was because Aisha was leading this war while mounting a camel.

[112] Ibid.

[113] Quoted from *Bihār al-Anwār*, Vol 25, Page 24, No. 42.

years after the *Hijra* or 625.[114] Tabãtabã'ī alleged there were evidences from the traditions about Muhammad and Àlī prophesied about the imāmate of Hasan.[115] Soon after the death of Àlī, Hasan became the second imām, but only enjoyed this status for six months. The rise of Mu'āwiyah gradually weakened Hasan's forces. During this time Hasan and his followers suffered extreme hardship and persecution, leading the imām to abdicate to Mu'āwiyah. The Mu'āwiyah tragically murdered Hasan in 672. It is believed that someone from his own household poisoned the imām under the influence of the Mu'āwiyah.[116]

The Third Imām – Abū 'Abdu'llāh Husayn ibn Àlī. Imām Husayn became famously known as *Sayyid al-Shuhada*, or "the Lord among martyrs." Similar to his brother's experience, Husayn suffered a great deal of persecution under the reign of Mu'āwiyah. His imāmate lasted for ten years since he died at the hands of Yazīd during the famous Karbala War. Although the Shī'ah suffered a severe defeat, this war contributed to the rise of Shī'ah. To this day, the Shī'ah community still celebrates the death of Husayn on the tenth of Muharram, known as *Āshūrā*.[117] One of the rituals during

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[114] Abu Jàfar Muhammad ibn Yàqub al-Kulayni, *Al-Kāfi*, trans. by Muhammad Sarwar, vol. 1, 2nd ed. (New York: The Islamic Seminary, 2015), 466.

[115] Tabãtabã'ī, *Shi'ite Islam*, 195.

[116] Ibid.

[117] See Sayyid Jafar Shahidi, "The Significance of Ashura in Shī'ī Hitory", in *The Shī'īte Heritage* Essays on Classical and Modern Traditions, 55. The importance of *Āshūrā* in this dissertation is not only due to its significance in Shī'ah history, but also because of Jewish influence in the early celebration of this day. In the early Muslim tradition *Āshūrā* itself was an exciting day celebrating the landing of Noah's ark and the exodus of Israelites from Egypt. It was believed that Muhammad preserved this celebration after observing the Day of Atonement practiced by the Jews in Medina. It is interesting to note that the *Encyclopedia of Islam 2* does not mention anything pertaining to Shī'ah ritual on this day in the article on *Āshūrā*. See Richard Gottheil, "Āshūrā," in *EI2*.

the *Āshūrā* is the procession of carrying the *nakhl*, a symbol of Husayn's coffin. His followers would bring the *nakhl* out and place it on the shoulders of the mourners. The impact of these two historical events in the spiritual life of Shī'ah are evidenced in the words of Àlī Shariati when he stated, "Every day is Ashoura, every place is Karbala."[*sic*][118]

Karbala War. The conflict between the family of Àlī and the family of Mu'āwiyah reached its peak when Yazīd, Mu'āwiyah's son, succeeded his father. Although the Shī'ah encountered numerous wars in their early history, nothing compares to the one that occurred on the tenth day of Muharram of 680 known as the Karbala War. The significance of this war, according Shī'ah, is as significant as to what happened to Christ on Golgotha, with the former being a turning point of the Shī'ah and some even claimed it as the rise of *Ahl al-bayt*.[119]

Karbala War began when a group of Husayn's supporters in Kufa invited him to come and settle there in 680.[120] Against warnings from some of his people, Husayn decided to accept the invitation. He took a small band of warriors with him including several women and children. The journey to Kufa turned into a bloody war when Yazīd and thousands of his soldiers under the leadership of Ùbaydu'llah ambushed and massacred Husayn and his followers.[121] After several days of war facing the

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[118] Vali Nasr, *The Shia Revival*, 128.

[119] Dabashi, *Shi'ism*, 76–7.

[120] During the rule of Àlī, around 656, the city of Kufa became prominent for Shī'ah's political and religious activities especially since Àlī moved to this city to mobilize his support. Nevertheless, the city was still divided between Sunni and Shī'ah. See Sayyid Husayn Muhammad Ja'fari, *The Origin and Early Development of Shia Islam* (Qum, Iran: Ansariyan, 2014), 101–29.

[121] Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam*, 28–32.

Mu'āwiyah's army, Husayn was decapitated on the tenth of Muharam. The Shī'ah worldwide until this day commemorate the day of Husayn's death, which is on the tenth of Muharram – *Āshūrā* Day, as a day of mourning.

Āshūrā Day. The death of the third imām, Husayn, on the tenth of Muharram became a monumental event for the Shī'ah throughout history. Shī'ah historians and theologians try to connect *Āshūrā* to the stories of creation, Noah, and Abraham to show the gravity of that day and the significance in the life of *Ahl al-bayt*. For example, Ayoub in *Redemptive Suffering in Islam* avers:

> We are sometimes told that the day of *Āshūrā* was a day on which God performed special acts of creation, or manifested His mercy and forgiveness to the prophets of old . . . . God in His wisdom created light on Friday, the first of Ramadān, and darkness in Wednesday, the day of *Āshūrā*. *Āshūrā* is a day of darkness and disorder in the universe, On it, darkness, the symbol of evil and chaos, was created; on it, after the death of Husayn, the laws of nature were suspended as the sun darkened in mid-day, the stars collided with one another, and the heaven were troubled.[122]

In 962 *Āshūrā* became an official religious observance during the rule of al-Muizz ad-Dawlah, a Buyid Caliph, who was also a Shī'ah.[123]

The Fourth Imām – 'Abū Muhammad Àlī ibn Husayn. Husayn's son, Àlī ibn Husayn, was one of the few young Shī'ah who survived the Karbala War. He was only four years old and was severely ill. Àlī was sent to Damascus along with part of his father's followers. There were several titles given to him: *as-Sajjād* (the prostrate), *az-Zaki* (the pure), *Zaynu'l-'Ābidīn* (the ornament of the worshippers).[124] Soon after his

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[122] Mahmoud Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam: A Study of the Devotional Aspects of Āshūrā in Twelver Shī'ism* (New York: Mouton Publishers, 1978), 150.

[123] Cyril Glassè, "Āshūrā" in *The New Encyclopedia of Islam*, 63.

[124] Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam,* 35; Tabātabā'ī, *Shi'ite Islam,* 201.

imprisonment under Yazīd's authority, he spent time in isolated worship where only some trusted men were allowed to meet with him.

The Fifth Imām – Abū Ja'far Muhammad ibn Àlī. The development of Shī'ah doctrine and the division within its community began in the time of the fifth imām who was known as al-Bāqir, which means "the one who opens the knowledge."[125] The title was given to him because of his immense understanding in the Islamic sciences.[126] During his leadership a great number of people became his followers, partly due to the chaos in the Umayyad's family.

The succession of the fourth imām to his son, Muhammad ibn Àlī Bāqir, was not without challenge. Some had chosen Husayn's other son, Zayd ibn Àlī, as the fifth imām and started what is known as the Zaydiyah.[127] Once again the Shī'ah was divided. According to the Shī'ah traditions, the fifth imām was poisoned by Ibrāhīm ibn Walīd, an Umayyad, and died.[128]

The Sixth Imām – Abū Àbdu'llāh Ja'far ibn Muhammad. The sixth imām, who was also known as Ja'far al-Sādiq, or the Righteous Ja'far, was born in 702 and

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[125] Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam,* 37.

[126] Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism*, 15.

[127] One of the differences between the Zaydiyah and the Twelver is that the former rejected the concept of passing the succession of the imāms to the next generation. The Imām must also have the courage to bear arms and oppose tyranny, something that was displayed in the lives of al-Bāqir and later on by al-Sadiq. See Dabashi, *Shi'ism,* 339. The latter part of this chapter will provide further description on Zaydiyah.

[128] Ibrāhīm became the caliphate in 744 following the death of Yazīd III, his own brother. His reputation as an Umayyad Caliphate is not recognized by the majority Islamic historians due to his controversial reign. He was killed during the battle of the Zāb in 750. See "Ibrāhīm b. al-Walīd b. 'Abd al-Malik" in *EI2*.

passed away at the age of 65.[129] His imāmate was known for two important events: the rise of the Abbāsid Caliphate and the nascent of the Ja'fari school.[130] One aspect that contributed to the success of the Abbāsid revolution involved the immense support from the Shī'ah. The Abbāsids, however, realized that the Shī'ah would never recognize them as legitimate rulers and turned against the Shī'ah once they gained the throne.[131]

Imām Ja'far succeeded his father at the time of the Abbāsid caliph, al-Mansūr. In spite of all the turmoil, Imām Ja'far was able to propagate Shī'ah teaching and science. This period represents a prominent period in early Islamic scholarship. Their emphasis on education and science resulted in the emergence of numerous Islamic scholars, such as Abu Hanifah, the founder of Hanafi school of law, and Jabir ibn Hayyan, the alchemist.[132] Ja'far suffered imprisonment by both Umayyads and Abbāsids and finally died of poisoning by the latter.

The Seventh Imām – Abu'l-Hasan Mūsā ibn Ja'far. Abu'l-Hasan Mūsā ibn Ja'far is also known as al-Kāzim, which means "the forbearing." His leadership years were filled with challenges both from within the Shī'ah community and by the Abbāsids.

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[129] Al-Kulaynī, *Al-Kāfi*, 477.

[130] The rivalry between the clan of Umayya and the clan of Hashim climaxed in the revolution led by the latter in 750. Although both came from the same tribe, Quraysh, the Hashimites claimed that since the Prophet belongs to their house hence the leadership of the Muslim empire should be from their clan. After a series of wars from 747, Abū Muslim finally defeated Marwān II, the last Umayyad caliph, in the Battle of Great Zāb River. This event marked the beginning of the Umayyads Caliph. The Umayyads ruled the Muslim empire until 1258 when the Mongol successfully invaded Baghdad. See Juan E. Campo, "Abbasid Caliphate," in *EI*, 1–2. See also "Abbasid" [on-line]; accessed on May 31, 2016; available from http://www.britannica.com/topic/Abbasid-dynasty; Internet.

[131] Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam,* 71.

[132] Tabātabā'ī, *Shi'ite Islam*, 294.

From within the Shī'ah, al-Kāzim was confronted by the Isma'īlis in the first year of his reign.[133] He then endured persecution under the Abbāsid Caliphs and was arrested while praying in the Mosque of the Prophet. The seventh imām was poisoned and later died in Baghdad.

The Eighth Imām – Abu'l-Hasan Àlī ibn Mūsā. The title of the eighth imām was ar-Ridā, which means "the approved." He was born in 765 in Medina. He reigned during the time of Hārūn ar-Rashīd, the fifth Abbāsid caliph, but mostly in the time of ar-Rashīd's son, al-Ma'mūn, who became the caliph after killing his own brother, al-Amīn.[134] Al-Ma'mūn tried to appease the Shī'ah by asking the imām to be the caliph. At first Imām Ridā turned down this proposal, but then later accepted it on his own conditions.[135]

The Ninth Imām – Abū Ja'far Muhammad ibn Àlī. The ninth imām, also known as at-Taqī, or "the God-fearing", was born in Medina in 810.[136] His father died when he was nine years old, and consequently, he resumed the imāmate. At-Taqī enjoyed a rather peaceful relationship with the Abbāsid Caliph, al-Ma'mūn, who himself demonstrated a friendly treatment towards the Shī'ah.[137] Al-Ma'mūn persuaded al-Taqī

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[133] Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam,* 39.

[134] The Abbāsid Dynasty suffered a serious decline following the bloody war between al-Ma'mūn and al-Amīn. In effort to gain popularity following his success in securing the throne, al-Ma'mūn persuaded the Shī'ah to support him. See Glassé, "Àbbāsids" in *The New Encyclopedia of Islam,* 11–4.

[135] Tabātabā'ī, *Shi'ite Islam,* 206–7. See also Newman, *Twelver Shiism,* 27.

[136] Al-Kulaynī, *Al-Kāfi,* 498; Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam,* 42–3.

[137] Abū Ja'far Abdullāh al-Ma'mūn ibn Hārūn al-Rashīd was the seventh Abbāsid Caliph who reigned from 813–33.

to support his sovereignty by giving his daughter, Umm al-Fadl, as the imām's wife. Shī'ah writers concurred that at-Taqī was poisoned by his wife during the Mu'tasim reign and died in 835.[138]

The Tenth Imām – Abu'l-Hasan Àlī ibn Muhammad. Mostly known as al-Hādī, or "the guided," the tenth imām was born in 827. He became the imām at seven years of age.[139] The persecution against the Shī'ah significantly increased during the time of al-Mutawakkil, the Abbāsid caliph, who often openly cursed and ridiculed al-Hādī. The caliph dishonored the Household of the Prophet by giving the order to destroy Imām Husayn's mausoleum in Karbala and the houses around it.[140] Just like his predecessors, al-Hādī was tortured, afflicted, and finally poisoned to death in 858.

The Eleventh Imām – Abū Muhammad Hasan al-Hassan ibn Àlī. The eleventh imām was also known as al-Àskarī, born in 846 in Medina.[141] He only reigned for a short period of time, roughly six years and mostly while in seclusion.[142] Just like his predecessor, Imām Askarī suffered persecution in the time of Mu'tamid, the Abbasid caliph. The primary reason for Mu'tamid persecuting al-Àskarī was because the former

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[138] Tabātabā'ī, *Shi'ite Islam,* 207; Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam,* 43. Abū Isḥāq Muḥammad ibn Hārūn al-Rashīd was the eighth Abbāsid Caliph who reigned from 833 until 842.

[139] Al-Kulaynī, *Al-Kāfi*, 504.

[140] Tabātabā'ī, *Shi'ite Islam,* 208. A. F. Badsha Husain in his article, "Shi'a Islam" in *The Muslim World*, Vol XXXI No. 2, April 1941, explains that this act is considered as blasphemous to the Shī'ah beliefs because holy shrines and noble tombs are their objects of respects.

[141] Al-Kulaynī, *Al-Kāfi*, 509. The name Àskarī, which means army, pertains to the army compound where both al-Hadī and al-Askarī lived under the surveillance of the Abbāsid Caliphs. See Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam,* 64.

[142] Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam,* 44.

knew of the Shī'ah beliefs that the eleventh imām would have a son, and this son would be the awaited Twelfth Imām or Imām Mahdi.[143]

The Twelfth Imām – Abu'l Qāsim Muhammad ibn Hasan. The transition from the eleventh imām to his successor was somewhat controversial due to the dispute about whether the eleventh imām had left a son or not. Shī'ah tradition admitted the problematic account pertaining to the birth of the Twelfth Imām would cause more divisions within the early Shī'ah. Some of them believed that the eleventh imām did not leave an heir while the rest concurred that he did have a son.[144] This dissertation follows the claim of the *'Ithnā-'Ashari* about the Mahdi as the Twelfth Imām.

The Shī'ah believe that the birth of the Twelfth Imām, or the Mahdi, was a miraculous one since the infant was instantly able to have a conversation with his parents.[145] According to Al-Kulaynī, the Mahdi was born on the "fifteenth of the month of Sha'ban in the year two hundred fifty five," which is approximately July 19, 869.[146] Not only was this baby able to converse, but the Shī'ah tradition claimed he was born circumcised with the umbilical cord already detached.[147]

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[143] Tabātabā'ī, *Shi'ite Islam,* 209.

[144] Momen records that the Shī'ah divided again into fifteen to twenty groups following the death of Imām 'Askari. See Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam,* 59–60.

[145] Al-Majlisī, *Al-Ghaiba,* 12. The first sentence that came from his mouth allegedly declares, "I bear witness that a deity other than Allah, the One without a partner is not; and I bear witness that Muhammad is Allah's Messenger."

[146] Al-Kulaynī, *Al-Kāfi,* 520.

[147] Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam,* 23.

Several titles were given to the Twelfth Imām: *al-Muntazar* (the awaited), *Hujatu 'Illah* (the proof), *al-Qā'im* (the one who will arise), *Bakiyyatu 'Ilah* (the remnant of God).[148] Under the conviction of their theology that the Twelfth Imām is the Mahdi, Àskari and other Shī'ah elites hid and protected this son from public sight. He was given the name of the Prophet, Muhammad. At the age of five, the Mahdi disappeared in the city of Samarra, but then returned. Later, the Mahdi disappeared in 939 and the Shī'ah believe that he went into the final occultation and he will return at the command of Allah.

Major Branches of Shī'ah

As a new community of faith, the Shī'ah formulated their own doctrine during the time of the twelve imāms. Their formulation of doctrine and succession of leadership within the *Ahl al-bayt* often resulted in the departure of factions who were displeased with the decisions about theological views of the mainline Shī'ah. Although there are only three major branches of Shī'ah in present-day Islam, numerous factions developed in the first fifty years history of Shī'ah.[149] Momen provides the division of Shī'ah in details and separates the dissention in this community into nine periods that resulted in no less than twenty groups.[150] However, this section will focus on these three main branches of Shī'ah.

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[148] Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam,* 45.

[149] Kamran Scot Aghaie, *The Martyrs of Karbala: Shíi Symbols and Rituals in Modern Iran.* Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004), 7.

[150] Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam,* 45–60. See also Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism,* 9–17. This section precludes the *Kharajites* since this faction separated themselves from Àlī, thus the term Shī'ah Àlī does not apply to them.

The Zaydiyah. Zayd al-Shahīd, the son of the fourth imām Zaynu'l-'Ābidīn from his other wife, openly challenged the leadership of his half-brother, al-Bāqir, claiming the position of the fifth imām. His followers were known as the Zaydiyah, or the Fiver. The nature of this division was not merely political but also doctrinal. Politically, although he was revolting against the Ummayads, Zayd refused to classify the first three caliphs as infidels as he maintained a moderate position towards the Sunni.[151]

Doctrinally, Zayd, having been influenced by the Mu'tazīlītes theology, rejected the mode of selecting the next imām through inherited succession and claimed that since the first three imāms were appointed by the Prophet through *nass* (designation), the later imāms should be selected based on the knowledge and piety of the candidate.[152] Hence, according to Sobhani, Zaydiyah contended that the imāmate "preserved not of any particular line of descent, but of the Álīds as a whole. Therefore, it can be claimed by any member of the family of the Prophet, able to establish his temporal authority, by force of arms if necessary."[153] Furthermore, they defended that the number of imāms is not limited to twelve and that the later imāms after Husayn are not void of error and sin.[154] Later on Zayd was killed by the Umayyads during a war in Kufa in 740.[155] Although the

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[151] W. Madelung, "Zaydiyya," in *EI2*. This refusal led to the departure of many of his supporters who then became allies for al-Bāqir.

[152] Dabashi, *Shi'ism,* 339. See also Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam,* 49. Hodgson argues that majority of the early Shī'ah actually "denied there was any designation of the next imām by a preceding one." See Hodgson, "How did early Shī'ah become Sectarian," 10.

[153] Ayatollah Ja'far Sobhani, *Doctrines of Shi'i Islam*, xiv.

[154] Madelung, "Zaydiyya," in *EI2*.

[155] Juan Campo, "Zaydi Shiism," 71920.

Zaydiyah is a branch of Shī'ah, their modern-day practices are closer to Sunnism than to their ancestors.[156] Most of the Fivers live in Yemen today and comprise about 36% of the country's population.

The Ismā'īli. The origination of the Ismā'īli goes back to the polemic over who will succeed the sixth imām, Ja'far as-Sādiq, who had originally chosen his oldest son, Ismā'īl, to be his successor. However, Ismā'īl died while his father was still alive and as a result, Ja'far chose Abu'l-Hasan Mūsā ibn Ja'far to be the seventh imām.[157] Ja'far's decision caused dissatisfaction among those who believed that the next imām should be Ismā'īl's son instead of his brother. This group of Shī'ah severed relations with their fellow Shī'ah and became known as the Ismā'īlis or the "Seveners." This group believed that Ismā'īl was the last imām and his son, Muhammad ibn Ismā'īl is the Mahdi who will return after his occultation.[158]

Islamic Eschatology

The coming of the Hour, or *qiyāma*, consisted of two of the earliest messages supposedly communicated by the angel Gabriel to Muhammad. They became the center of Muhammad's Meccan sūrahs.[159] The prophet's message on the judgment day was

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[156] Vali Nasr, *The Shia Revival*, 75.

[157] Some of the Anti- Isma'īli claimed that Isma'īli had been deprived of his succession rights due to his indulgence in drink that caused the disavowal by his father. Daftary argues that this report is only a fabrication from the Twelver. For detailed information on the Isma'īli, see Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

[158] Dabashi, *Shi'ism,* 339.

[159] Smith and Haddad, *Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection,* 1–12. Meccan Sūrahs are chapters in the Qur'ān revealed to Muhammad during his time in Mecca.

rejected and ridiculed by the pagans of the pre-Islamic Arabs. Smith and Haddad provide two explanations for this rejection. First, the pre-Islamic Arabs were only concerned with genealogies and the tribal relationship, and never had an understanding about the history of mankind.[160] Second, the pre-Islamic Arabs' fatalistic determinism included their belief that every human life is for a fixed term or *ajal*, which means, according to Mona Siddique, there is no room for divine intervention.[161] Siddique further explains that these pagans found it difficult to understand that the "decayed bones" would eventually return to life.[162]

It could be possible that Muhammad purposely depicted *qiyāma* in a horrific and gruesome way with the purpose of "creating a sense of awe in the hearts of the disbelievers," specifically, the Arab pagans.[163] Shahid contends that Muhammad had two dimensions in using the message of the wrath of God and *qiyāma* as his "two effective weapons." The first dimension was as a defense against his persecutors, and the second dimension was to win adherents.[164]

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[160] Smith and Haddad, *Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection*, 3.

[161] Ibid., 5. Mona Siddique, "Death, Resurrection, and Human Destiny: Qur'ānic and Islamic Perspectives" in *Death, Resurrection, and Human Destiny,* David Marshall and Lucinda Mosher, eds. (Washington, Georgetown University, 2014), 28–9.

[162] Siddique, "Death, Resurrection, and Human Destiny," 28.

[163] Shahid, *The Last Trumpet*, 22. Some examples of graphic descriptions of hell in the Qur'ān can be found in Sūrah 47:15 "(Here is) a Parable of the Garden which the righteous are promised: in it are rivers of water incorruptible; rivers of milk of which the taste never changes; rivers of wine, a joy to those who drink; and rivers of honey pure and clear. In it there are for them all kinds of fruits; and Grace from their Lord. (Can those in such Bliss) be compared to such as shall dwell forever in the Fire, and be given, to drink, boiling water, so that it cuts up their bowels (to pieces)?" Sūrah 69:35–37, ""So no friend hath he here this Day. "Nor hath he any food except the corruption from the washing of wounds, "Which none do eat but those in sin."

[164] Ibid., 27.

Muslim theologians claim that the Qur'ān describes the end of times in greater details than any other major scripture.[165] It is possible that this claim is accurate since approximately one-third of the Qur'ān, according to Siddique, is "eschatological in character."[166] Islamic eschatology itself can be divided into three parts: the day of judgment, the Garden and the Fire, and the resurrection of the believers. Among these three, the depiction of the Garden and the Fire is the most well-known of the Islamic eschatology. This has to do with the glamorous description of the dwellers of the Garden (or Paradise) as portrayed in several Sūrahs and in particular Sūrah 56:12–40.[167]

The focus of the discussion in this dissertation is on one of the elements of the first division in Islamic eschatology, that is the appearance of Jesus on the day of judgment. The return of Jesus, in the words of Siddique, is "one of the most intriguing signs of the End Times."[168] Islam in general continues to debate the teachings regarding

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[165] William C. Chittick, "Muslim Eschatology," in *The Oxford Handbook on Eschatology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 132.

[166] Siddique, "Death, Resurrection, and Human Destiny," 30.

[167] "In Gardens of Bliss: a number of people from those of old, and a few from those of later times. (They will be) on Thrones encrusted (with gold and precious stones), Reclining on them, facing each other round about them will (serve) youths of perpetual (freshness), with goblets, (shining) beakers, and cups (filled) out of clear-flowing fountains; No after-ache will they receive therefrom, nor will they suffer intoxication: And with fruits, any that they may select: And the flesh of fowls, any that they may desire. And (there will be) Companions with beautiful, big, and lustrous eyes, Like unto Pearls well-guarded. A Reward for the deeds of their past (life). Not frivolity will they hear therein, nor any taint of ill, Only the saying, "Peace! Peace". The Companions of the Right Hand,- what will be the Companions of the Right Hand? (They will be) among Lote-trees without thorns, Among Talh trees with flowers (or fruits) piled one above another,- In shade long-extended, by water flowing constantly, and fruit in abundance. Whose season is not limited, nor (supply) forbidden, and on Thrones (of Dignity), raised high. We have created (their Companions) of special creation. And made them virgin - pure (and undefiled), - Beloved (by nature), equal in age,- For the Companions of the Right Hand A (goodly) number from those of old, and a (goodly) number from those of later times." [*sic*]

[168] Siddique, "Death, Resurrection, and Human Destiny," 33. Siddique continues to explain her reason by stating that, "For Muslims, Jesus is not just a prophet, he is also a chosen Messenger from God, the miracle-worker, the *rūh-Allah*, or "spirit of God," one of the key prophets in the long history of

the return of Christ both within the Islamic community and in relations to the interfaith dialogue with Christians. Among the Islamic community, for example, one of the most important *fatwas* pertaining to this issue in modern day probably came from Sheikh Muhammed Shaltūt, Vice Principal of the Faculty of Religious Principles of Al-Azhar University in a response to an Indian officer serving in the Near East.[169] The question was, "Is Jesus [Isa] living or dead, in the view of Koran and the Sunnah? What is the status of a Muslim who denies that he is living? What is the status of one who does not believe in him if it be supposed that he is to return again to this world?"[170] In his answer to this question, Shaltut rejected the notion of Jesus still alive in heaven and claimed that " . . . neither in the Koran nor in the Sunnah support to establish a belief with which the heart can be satisfied that Jesus was raised up to heaven in bodily form and that he is now alive in heaven and will descend to the earth at the end of the world."[171] It is clear from his *fatwa* that Shaltut denied that this teaching is crucial to Islamic core beliefs. While some admired Shaltut for his stand on this issue, his *fatwa* drew vast criticism forcing him to defend his position in the second article published in 1965.[172]

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prophecy, the one preceding Muhammad, the one lifted up by God at the point of crucifixion, but also the one who will act as a witness on the Day of Judgment."

[169] This Sunni scholar who is also known as Mahmūd Shaltut was first appointed as lecturer of Al-Azhar in 1927 and then served as the Grand Imām of Al-Azhar in 1958 until his death in 1963. See Kate Zebiri, *Mahmūd Shaltūt and Islamic Modernism.* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).

[170] C.C. Adams, "A Fatwa on the 'Ascension of Jesus," *Moslem World 34* (1944); 215–7.

[171] Adams, "A Fatwa on the 'Ascension of Jesus," 216.

[172] Zebiri, *Mahmūd Shaltūt and Islamic Modernism*, 14.

Questions on the influence of Christians eschatology in the apocalyptic writings of Islam remain a polemic between the two religions with Muslims denial on such influence. In spite of this debate, Furnish correctly argues, "Muslim eschatology, or the belief system regarding the events leading up to the end of the world, springs from a Judeo-Christian context and this not surprisingly resembles that of both Jews and Christians."[173]

Al-Imām al-Mahdi as the Shī'ah Awaited Messiah

The origination of the Mahdi's concept allegedly first occurred in the Shī'ah community during the transition time from the fourth imām, Zaynùl-'Ābidīn, to the fifth imām, al-Bāqir. Mukhtār al-Thaqafī, mobilized the Shī'ah to support Muhammad ibn al-Hanafiyya, Àlī's third son from another wife.[174] When Ibn al-Hanafīyya died in 700, his followers declared him to be the Mahdi with the belief that he did not die but had gone into occultation in the Radwā mountains and would one day return after his occultation.[175]

While some often strictly identify the concept of the Mahdi with the Shī'ah, one should understand that this issue is a contentious matter among the Muslim scholars. The majority of Sunni scholars would deny the existence of the Mahdi in their *hadīth* and

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[173] Timothy Furnish, "Islam," in *Encyclopedia of Millennialism and Millennial Movements* (New York: Routledge, 200), 182.

[174] Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam,* 35. al-Thaqafī's movement is considered as early manifestation of Shī'ah extremism. See "Al-Mukhtār b. Abī 'Ubayd al-Thakafī" in *EI2.*

[175] Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam,* 36. See also Tabātabā'ī, *Shi'ite Islam,* 75. Newman argues that this was probably the first time the Shī'ah employed the term Mahdi. See Newman, *Twelver Shiism,* 21; Sachedina, *Islamic Messiamism,* 11–12.

argue that those that exist are *zaeef*, or "of doubtful authenticity."[176] Ayoub held that the early Sunni had the Mahdi in their teaching.[177] Shaykh Muhammad Hisham Kabbani,[178] the chairman of the Islamic Supreme Council of America, claims "the coming of Mahdi is established doctrine for Sunni." Ayatollah Ibrahim Amini provides a helpful discussion between Dr. Fahimi and Mr. Hoshyar. Arguing from *Al-Mahdiyya fi al-islam,* Dr. Fahimi alludes that the two most authentic books of Sunni *hadīth*, *Sahih Bukhari* and *Sahih Muslim* have not recorded the tradition of Mahdi.[179] In answering this claim, Hoshyar refers to some of the historical facts during the process of the transmission. Ibn Khaldun, for example, rejected the *ahādith* from Qutn ibn Khalifa and Harun simply because they were Shī'ah.[180]

It is not difficult to see the double standards that were applied in accreditation of the traditions reported by the individual whom they favored. For example, Bukhari accepted the traditions from Marwan ibn Hakam in his *Sahih*, and relied upon them. However, Marwan was one of the major causes of the Battle of the Camel, having encouraged and instigated Talha to fight against Àlī. Then, during the battle, the same

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[176] Farzana Hazan, *Prophecy and the Fundamentalist Quest: An Integrative Study of Christian and Muslim Apocalpytic Religion* (Jefferson, North Carolina, McFarland & Company, 2008), 46.

[177] Mahmoud Ayoub, *Review of Islamic Messianism: The Idea of the Mahdi in Twelver Shi'ism*, by Abdulaziz Abdulhussein Sachedina *Muslim World*, 72 no 3–4 (1982): 254–55.

[178] Shaykh Muhammad Hisham Kabbani, *The Approach of Armageddon? An Islamic Perspective* (Washington: Islamic Supreme Council of America, 2003), 228.

[179]Amini, Ayatollah Ibrahim, *Al-Imām Al-Mahdi: The Just Leader of Humanity*. trans. by Abdulaziz Sachedina (Iran: Ansariyan Publication, 2007), 8.

[180] Ibid., 11.

Marwan killed Talha.[181]

While it is true that the Shī'ah have been consistent with this teaching, the concept of Mahdi can actually be found in the Sunni's teachings. Sunni and Shī'ah differ over the Mahdi in two main areas: 1) his origin and 2) his role. Pertaining to his role, Sachedina claims that the Sunnites see the Mahdi as merely the "ultimate Caliph of the Prophet" and not as "the restorer of Islamic purity as an essential part of their creed" as believed by the Shī'ah.[182]

Regarding this controversy, there are abundant *ahadīth* on Mahdi recorded by transmitters. Hadhrat Abdullah bin Mas'ood reports from the Prophet, who said, "The world will not come to pass until a man from among my family, whose name will be my name, rules over the Arabs."[183] Àlī ibn Abū Talīb has related a tradition from the Prophet who informed him, "The promised Mahdi will be among my family. God will make the provisions for his emergence within a single night."[184] The most detail description of the Mahdi's return reported by Abū Sa'id al-Khudari:

> Severe calamity from the direction of their ruler will befall my people during the Last Days. It will be a calamity which, in severity, shall be unprecedented. It will be so violent that the earth with injustice and corruption will shrivel for its inhabitants. The believers will not find refuge from oppression. At that time God will send a man from my family to fill the earth with justice and equity just as it is filled with injustice and tyranny. The dwellers of the heavens and the earth will be pleased with him. The earth will bring forth all that grows for him, and the heavens will pour down rains in abundance. He will live among the people for seven or nine years.

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[181] Ibid., 13.

[182] Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism*, 14.

[183] Tirmidhi, *Sahih*, Vol. 9, 74; Abū Dawud, *Sahih*, Vol. 5, p. 207.

[184] Ibn Majah, *Sahih,* Vol. 2, p. 519.

> From all the good that God will bestow on the inhabitants of the earth, the dead will wish to come to live again.[185]

The Teaching of the Mahdi in *Al-Kāfi*

Since the primary source for the Mahdi in this dissertation is from *Al-Kāfi,* the following discussion will elaborate on the Mahdi from the most respected *hadīth* in Shī'ah. The English translation of *Al-Kāfi* is divided into eight volumes where each volume consists of several parts, and each part consists of several chapters. Al-Kulaynī discusses the teaching about the Mahdi in Part Four of Volume 1 with the title: *The Book about People with Divine Authority*. One would be able to understand the importance of the teaching of People with Divine Authority, referring to the Muhammad and twelve imāms, considering the length of this section covers a hundred and thirty chapters in four hundred and twelve pages.

Al-Kulaynī begins this book by building the argument for the divine authority of imāms by proving the existence of God and the needs of communicating the divine truth to His creatures. Thus, it commences with the answer from the Imām *'Alayhi al-salam* when an atheist came to him demanding a proof of the truthfulness of the prophet and messengers. The imām then explains:

> It is a fact that this Creator is All-wise and Most High. His creatures cannot see, touch, associate and directly communicate with Him. It proves that His deputies must be present among His creatures. It is His deputies and ambassadors who speak to people for Him and provide them guidance to protect their interests; to tell them what is beneficial to them and what are the best means of survival and what may cause their destruction. This provides the presence among people of those who convey the commandments of the Creator who is All-wise, All-knowing Allah, the

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[185] Amini, *Al-Imām Al-Mahdi,* 7. For more *hadīth* on the Mahdi see Ayatollah Ibrahim Amini, *Al-Imām Al-Mahdi* ,1–7. Ibn Kathir provides a whole chapter on The Mahdi and has numerous references to the *ahadīth*, see Ibn Kathir, *The Signs Before the Day of Judgement* (London: Dar Al Taqwa, 1991), 20–4.

> Most Holy, the Most High, to them. Such people are the prophets, *'Alayhim al-Salam*, the chosen ones from among His creatures. They are the people of wisdom, disciplined with wisdom and sent to people with the message of wisdom. They are different from other people – although like them in physical form and shape - in their condition of discipline and their receiving direct support from Allah, the Most Holy, the Most High and All-wise.[186]

He further explains the uniqueness of the Prophet Muhammad in comparison to other creatures by saying that "after the Messenger of Allah the Divine Authority is the Holy Qur'ān."[187] The Divine Authority, according to *Al-Kāfi*, does not stop with Muhammad but continues to Àlī ibn Abū Talīb. Al-Kulaynī wrote, "I then acknowledged that Imām Àlī *'Alayhi al-Salam,* is the guardian and supervisor of the Holy Qurān and obedience to him obligatory and he is the Divine Authority over the people after the Messenger of *Allah 'Alayhi al-Salam.*" [*sic*][188] In fact, according to *Al-Kāfi*, this leadership with Divine Authority is a covenant from God with the imāms.[189]

In his effort to strengthen the argument on the distinctiveness of the family of Àlī, *Al-Kāfi* referred to Sūrah 4:54 as the proof that God has chosen Muhammad's offspring for a special position.[190] Al-Kulaynī wrote the words of the sixth imām, Ja'far as-Sidiq:

> Allah says that from the descendant of Abraham He has made His messengers, Prophets and *À'immāh*. How is it that these people acknowledge the case about the

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[186] Al-Kulaynī, *Al-Kāfi,* Vol 1, Part 4, 145.

[187] Al-Kulaynī, *Al-Kāfi*, 146. The imām clarifies his statement in this conversation by explaining that "the Holy Qur'ān cannot serve as Divine Authority without a guardian and supervisor whose words from and about the Holy Qur'ān can reveal the truth."

[188] Al-Kulaynī, *Al-Kāfi,* Vol 1, Part 4, 145.

[189] Ibid., 259.

[190] "Or do they envy mankind for what Allah hath given them of his bounty? but We had already given the people of Abraham the Book and Wisdom, and conferred upon them a great kingdom." Sürah 4:54.

> descendants of Abraham but they refuse to accept Imāmate (the Leadership with Divine Authority) in the family of Muhammad?[191]

Ja'far also claimed that Muhammad himself prophesied about the priesthood of his descendants and the injustice they will suffer from those who refuse to hear them.

> I am the Messenger of Allah to all people but after me there will be *À'immāh* from my family for the people. They will rise among the people but they will be rejected. The leaders of the unbelievers and misguidance and their followers will do injustice to them.[192]

The Doctrine of Imāmate in Shī'ah

As explained earlier in this chapter, one significant distinction between the Sunni and the Shī'ah is the selection of their spiritual leader. The Shī'ah firmly believe that an imām should be the ultimate leader of the community, someone from the family of Muhammad. Although the line of prophethood ended with Muhammad, the Shī'ah affirm that someone who is impeccable from the line of Àlī has been prepared to continue the leadership of the entire Muslim community.

The imām, or leader, plays a central role in the Shī'ah community. The doctrine of Imāmate in Shī'ah theology incorporates the sinlessness, infallibility, and the pre-existence of the imāms, doctrine that elevates them higher than ordinarily humans. As the highest spiritual authority, the imām should have knowledge not just in the religious, but also in the social and political realms. In addition, he should have good relations with those he leads.[193] What differentiates the Shī'ah imām from the Sunni *ulama*, —a

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[191] Al-Kulaynī, *Al-Kāfi*, 186. *À'immāh* is imām in plural form.

[192] Al-Kulaynī, *Al-Kāfi*, 197.

[193] Àllāmah Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tabātabā'ī explains: "Thus the imāmate and religious leadership in Islam may be studied from three different perspectives: from the perspective of Islamic government, of Islamic sciences and injunctions, and of leadership and innovative guidance on the spiritual

scholarly figure who exercises limited authority— is the imām's *ismah*, that is his sinlessness and infallibility. Imām is chosen by *nass*—by divine designation and the nomination of his spiritual predecessor.[194] Thus, his authority cannot be questioned. David Pinault observes that the Shī'ah understanding of the succession of imāms is modeled after Bible history: Abraham was aided by Ishmael, Moses by Aaron, Jesus by Simon Peter.[195]

Farah explains that the imām's teachings are infallible because they come "first from Allah, then from His chosen mouthpiece Muhammad, then Àlī, and finally his legitimate descendants."[196] In Shī'ah teaching, this infallibility is essential, because the imām is responsible for receiving, recording, and delivering the divine ordinances. God's guidance for the people must be kept intact.[197] The imām is not only infallible but also omniscient, knowing the secrets of all arts and languages, even the language of animals.[198]

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life. Shi'ism believes that since Islamic society is in dire need of guidance in each of these three aspects, the person who occupies the function of giving that guidance and is the leader of the community in these areas of religious concern must be appointed by God and the Prophet." Àllāmah Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tabātabā'ī, *Shi'ite Islam* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1975), 173.

[194] David Pinault, *The Shiites: Ritual and Popular Piety in a Muslim Community* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 8–9.

[195] Ibid., 25.

[196] Farah, *Islam*, 178.

[197] Amini, *Al-Imām Al-Mahdi: The Just Leader of Humanity*, 65. See also Abu Abdillah Muhammad ibn Numan Shaykh Al-Mufid, *Tashihul I'tiqad: The Emandation of a Shi'ite Creed*, translated by Irfan Abdul Hamid (Tehran, Iran: World Organization for Islamic Services, 2007), 83–4.

[198] Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide*, 93.

The doctrine of imāmate, or priesthood, is not just a fundamental one in Shī'ah theology, but at the same time a complicated and confusing one. In his preface to a study on the Imāmate in early Shī'ah, Amir-Moezzi admits that

> What most characterized studies dedicated to Imāmism is the constant confusion between the teachings of the imāms reported by the oldest compilation of Imāmite traditions and the ideas professed by later imāmate thinkers and scholars, not to mention the sudden historical and doctrinal evolution that Imāmism has known since occultation of the twelfth imām.[199]

Along these lines, Momen also concurs that the doctrine of the Twelfth Imām is a puzzling one. Nevertheless, Momen defends his statement by arguing that because "this is the point in Shi'i history where the events related become of miraculous, extraordinary nature and the non-believer may be unwilling to go along with the facts as related by Shi'is."[*sic*][200]

Claims on the divine nature of the imāms can be found from the writings of Ayoub and Amir-Moezzi. In *Redemptive Suffering in Islam*, Ayoub avers that although imāms are human beings, but "unlike other men, the imāms were shaped not of the dust of the earth but were first created as forms of light singing the praises of God long before the material world came into being."[201] In other words, imāms existed even before the earth was created. In fact, Ayoub was not the only one who made such statement. In *The Divine Guide in Early Shiism*, Amir-Moezzi divided his work into three parts: the pre-existence of the imām, the existence of the imām, and the super-existence of the imām. On the pre-existence of the imām, Amir-Moezzi declares:

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[199] Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide*, 1.

[200] Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam*, 161.

[201] Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering*, 54–5.

> From his own light, God made a luminous ray spring forth, and from this ray he made a second ray proceed; the first was the light of Muhammad, that of Prophecy (*nubuwwa*), that of the exoteric (*zaāhir*); the second, of identical nature but subordinate to the first, was the light of 'Ali, that of the Imāmate or *walaya*, of the esoteric (*bātin*).[202]

In regard to the super-existence of the imāms, Shī'ah concurs that the imām "actually continues to live even after he leaves the physical world."[203] It is not certain if it means that all the twelve imāms are still living in this world, but all Shī'ah writers have argued that the Mahdi, in particular, is still living since the time of his occultation.[204] Amir-Moezzi not only defines the pre-existence and super-existence of the imāms, but he also traces the traditions that believe the imām is, to use the Christian term, the sustainer of the world. Amir-Moezzi declares:

> Without the Imām, the universe would crumble, since he is the Proof, the Manifestation, and the Organ of God, and he is the Means by which human beings can attain if not knowledge of God, at least what is knowable in God. Without the Perfect Man, without a Sacred Guide, there is no access to the divine and the world could only be engulfed in darkness. The Imām is the Threshold through which God and the creatures communicate. He is thus cosmic necessity, the key and the center of the universal economy of the sacred.[205]

In his other work, *The Spirituality of Shi'i Islam: Beliefs and Practices*, Amir-Moezzi explicitly affirms "the twofold dimensions of the figure of the imām, namely the divine

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[202] Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide*, 30.

[203] Ibid., 99.

[204] Arjomand, *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imām,* 162. See also Allamah Muhammad Baqir Al-Majlisi, *The Book of Occultation: Kitāb Al-Ghaibah* (Iran: Ansariyan, 2007), 166–76. Arjomand explains that the Hidden Imām continues to perform "the essential function of the imāmate of the age in concealment." See also Arjomand, *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam,* 233.

[205] Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide*, 125.

(*lāhūt*) and the human (*nāsūt*) elements and the correspondence between them."[206] He continues to explains that " . . . . the Imām is not only presented as the man of God par excellence but as participating fully in the Names, Attributes, and Acts that theology usually reserves for God alone."[207]

Evidence of the Shī'ah conviction on the divine nature of the imāms can also be found in the writing of Sobhani who explains the fundamental doctrine of Shī'ah in his book *The Doctrine of Shi'i Islam*. Using one of the Shī'ah tradition, Sobhani claims that "the Imāms of the *Ahl al-bayt* are ranged alongside the Qur'ān; this means that, just as the Qur'ān is immune against all types of error, so are the Imāms from all mental and volitional sin."[208] One would agree that all of these Shī'ah teachings pertaining to the Imām and the Mahdi clearly point to the divine nature of the imāmate.

The Occultation

There is one important aspect in Shī'ah theology that cannot be separated from the hope of the coming of the Mahdi, that is *ghayba*, or the state of occultation of the Twelfth Imām. In fact, Sachedina contends that *ghayba* is the central belief in Shī'ah doctrine on the Mahdi.[209] The Shī'ah teaches that the Twelfth Imām did not die but has been hidden by God from humanity because "his life has been miraculously prolonged

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[206] Amir-Moezzi, *The Spirituality of Shi'i Islam: Beliefs and Practices* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2011), xv–xvi.

[207] Amir-Moezzi, *The Spirituality of Shi'i Islam*, 103.

[208] Sobhani, *Doctrines of Shi'i Islam,* 112.

[209] Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism*, 78.

until the day when he will manifest himself again by God's permission."[210] Thus, the occultation of the Mahdi is a "divine mystery," and it is impossible for humans to fully comprehend.[211] God, in Shī'ah eschatology, is the only one who can cause the Mahdi to disappear, and the only one who can command the Mahdi to return. The purpose of the occultation is to protect the Mahdi from dangers, such as being killed by the enemy. No one knows the length of the occultation, but when the time comes, God will command him to return and "take control of the world in order to restore justice and equity."[212]

The Shī'ah claim that the occultation is a tradition from the prophets in the past and thus, the Mahdi was not the first one experiencing *ghayba*. Referring to the events occurred in the life of the character of the Bible, one Shī'ah tradition declares:

> Sa'id ibn Jubair says, I heard the Doyen of the Worshippers Àlī ibn al-Husayn (a.s.) say, "In the *Qā'im* of ours there are tradition from the traditions of the apostles, peace be with them. A tradition from Adam, a tradition from Noah, a tradition from Abraham, a tradition from Jesus, a tradition from Ayyūb, a tradition from Muhammad (a.s). The tradition from Adam and Noah is the length of his life; the tradition from Abraham is the secrecy of his birth and the desertion of the people, the tradition from Moses is the fear and the disappearance; the tradition from Jesus is the dispute of the people about him; the tradition from Ayyūb is relief after the trials; and the tradition from Muhammad (a.s) is his rise with the sword.[213]

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[210] Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam,* 162.

[211] Ayatolah Ja'far Sobhani. *Doctrines of Shi'i Islam: A Compendium of Imami Beliefs and Practices*, trans. Reza Shah-Kazemi (New York: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 2001), 118.

[212] Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism*, 23.

[213] Al-Majlisī, *The Book of Occultation*, 205. Al-Majlisī was one of the most respected seventeenth-century Shī'ah scholar who produced approximately forty-eight books during his lifetime. His magnum opus was *Bihar al-Anwar*, which is the compilation of traditions from several Shī'ah traditionists. See Andrew J. Newman, *Twelver Shiism*, 188–89.

One should notice that al-Majlisī was actually referring to the prophets and not the apostles in the New Testament sense. Another Shī'ah traditionist explained that Moses, Joseph, and Jonah experienced occultation as well.[214]

Two principles explain why *ghayba* is essential in the Shī'ah expectation of the return of the Mahdi. The first principle regards the importance of the sinlessness and the infallibility of the imām, which has been explained in the previous section of this chapter. The second principle is the necessity of the existence of an imām as the leader of the Shī'ah community.[215]

One who is conducting a study on this particular doctrine in English will face a challenge of very limited sources since there are few books which can be used as the primary foundation of *ghayba.* The first one is *Kitāb al-Ghaibah* by 'Allamah Muhammad Bāqir al-Majlisī; the second one is *Kitab al-Ghayba: The Book of Occultation* by Abu Abudllah Muhammad bin Ibrahim bin Ja'far al-Katib an-Numani;[216]

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[214] Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn al-Hasan al-Tusi, *Kitab Al-Ghaibah:The Book of Occultation* (Tehran: Ansariyan Publications) Kindle Reader. Al-Tusi was born in the village of Tus in 995 and died in the city of Najaf, December 1067. *Kitab Al-Ghaibah,* probably his last work before his death, written to address "the key theological problem facing the Twelver Community." See Newman, *Twelver Shiism*, 87–93.

[215] Arjomand, *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam*, 44. The first defense on the necessity of the continuous existence of the imām can be found in the defend of *ghayba* in *Risalah on the Ghaybah* by Al-Sharīf al-Murtadā as follow stated: "What shows this is that the *ghaybah* is a derivation of principles which if correct, then the discussion on the *ghaybah* is the easiest and clearest thing, because it depends on these (principles); and if they are not right then the discussion on the *ghaybah* is difficult and impossible. The explanation of this statement is as follows: Reason (*'aql*) requires that there should be a leader at all times, that these leaders should be infallible [and that he is such that] one is secure against his committing any bad deed. If these two principles are established, there remains nothing but the leadership of the one about whose Imāmate we shall indicate, since this quality which [the mind] decrees and whose existence it indicates, is not found in any one except him. In this way, the validity of *ghaybah* follows necessarilty, untouched by doubt. This we need to prove the truth of these two principles which have been mentioned." Abdulaziz Sachedina "A Treatise on the Occultation of the Twelfth Imāmite Imām," in *Studia Islamica* no 48 (1978), 109–24.

[216] Abu Abdullah Muhammad bin Ibrahim bin Ja'far al-Katib an-Numani, *Kitab al-Ghayba: The Book of Occultation*, trans. Abdullah al-Shahin (Qum, Iran: Ansariyan Publications). [on-line]; available from https://www.al-islam.org/printpdf/book/export/html/39117; accessed on May, 15, 2017;

the third one is *Book of Occultation* by Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn al-Hasan al-Tusi. However, there is no systematic treatment of g*hayba* even in *Kitāb al-Ghaibah.* Perhaps Said Amir Arjomand presents the most thorough explanation of the development of *ghayba* in his article "The Consolation of Theology: Absence of the Imām and Transition from Chiliasm to Law in Shi'ism."[217]

As the expectation of the re-appearance of the Twelfth Imām from his occultation increasingly grew, the doctrine went through some developments. Shī'ah leaders attempted to provide explanations as the questions arose from community pertaining to the whereabouts of the Twelfth Imām. As a result, the Shī'ah in general believe in two parts of the occultation: the minor, or lesser occultation (*ghaybat al-sughra*), and the major, or greater occultation (*ghaybat al-kubra*).[218] The minor occultation began in 874 and ended in 939.[219] The greater occultation began in 939 and will continue until God commands the Mahdi to return.

The Minor Occultation. It has been explained earlier in this chapter that the Shī'ah were thrown into a bewilderment following the death of the eleventh imām, Hasan

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Internet. Hereafter will be referred as an-Numani. His work is considered highly reliable for at least two reasons: first, he was the student of al-Kulaynī, and second, he was familiar with the reality of the absence of the Twelfth Imām. Just like al-Tusi, an-Numani had to deal with some of the Shī'ah who questioned the occultation because "they did not believe in Allah's power to extend life beyond human comprehension and experience." See Newman, *Twelver Shiism*, 58–60.

[217] Said Amir Arjomand, "The Consolation of Theology: Absence of the Imam and Transition from Chiliasm to Law in Shi'ism," *The Journal of Religion* 76, no. 4 (1996): 548–71.

[218] Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam,* 162–65. Sachedina prefers to use the terms *al-ghayba al-qasira* or Short Occultation and *al-ghayba al-tamma*, or the Complete Occultation. See Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism*, 79–80.

[219] Shī'ah traditions differ on the age of the young Mahdi was hidden. Some such as al-Tusi and al-Mufid claimed that the Twelfth Imām disappeared several days after his birth while some asserted that he went to the concealment at the age of 5. See Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism*, 82–3.

al-Àskarī, pertaining to whether the imām had a son or not. This dissertation follows the majority of Shī'ah who believe that the Twelfth Imām was divinely hidden at his early age. There is still a debate on the age of the young imām when he disappeared, many believe that it happened after the death of his father.[220] Shī'ah writers admit that the primary reason for this was to protect him from being murdered by the enemy.[221] From his unknown place of concealment, the imām allegedly designated four successive deputies as the mediators between him and the people. The names of these four deputies respectively were Abu Àmr Ùthman ibn Sa'id al-Àmri, Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn Ùthman al-Àmri, Abu al-Qasim al-Husayn ibn Ruh al-Nawbakhti, and Abu al-Hasan Àli ibn Muhammad al-Samarri.[222]

The Greater Occultation. If the minor occultation begins at the birth of the Mahdi, the major, or greater, occultation commences soon after the death of the four deputies. During this uncertain length of his *ghayba*, the Shī'ah community entered a problematic theological debate within themselves as the leaders tried to provide explanations for the absence of the Imām.[223] As Arjomand rightly asserts, the death of an imām would be "chronic threat to the survival of the community" since Shī'ah imāms are

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[220] Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam,* 161.

[221] Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism*, 103–4.

[222] Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism*, 86–99. For the sake of the discussion, this dissertation leaves out the details of roles and functions of these deputies.

[223] Al-Tusi, for example, goes to great lengths in his book to refute splinter groups who reject the core doctrine of The Twelvers, such as the *Nawusiyya*, *Waqifiya*, and the *Kaisaniya*. See al-Tusi, *Kitab al-Ghaiba*, Kindle Reader.

the "pillars of Shi'ite Islam."[224] This perplexing situation forced the leaders to come up with a theological solution by adopting a chiliastic idea that is a foreign concept to Shī'ah as Arjomand explains,

> To make sense of this crisis while retaining its control, the Imāmi leadership had little choice but to borrow the idea of occultation from the chiliastic extremist and asserted its authority on behalf of "the son of Hasan ibn Àli," who was said to be in hiding and was eventually identified as the *Qa'im* (apocalyptic redresser) and the Mahdi (rightly guided, messianic leader).[225]

Nevertheless, amidst this chaotic state, his faithful followers claimed that the Imām frequently appeared to his devotees in visions and dreams.[226]

There have been several significance developments of Shī'ah eschatology reached during the Greater Occultation. First, the doctrine of imāmate rapidly transformed from "a theory of authority to a topic in theology," meaning since the imāms are not present in this world to lead the Shī'ah community in worldly matters, they became "other worldly mediators and saviors in the Shi'ite economy of salvation."[227] One notices that Arjomand includes the rest of the imāms as the mediators and saviors instead of the Mahdi who is the sole savior for the Shī'ah. Second, the title of the Mahdi became the official reference to the Twelfth Imām. Prior to his occultation, Shī'ah would refer the Twelfth Imām as *al-Qa'im*, or the Redresser of Justice. Third, Shī'ah authorities agreed that there were no deputies assigned as the mediators between the Mahdi and his followers as was the case during the Minor Occultation.

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[224] Arjomand, "The Consolation of Theology," 549.

[225] Ibid., 550.

[226] Momen, *Shi'i Islam*, 165.

[227] Arjomand, "The Consolation of Theology," 570.

The Supremacy of the Mahdi in the *Qiyāma*

Shī'ah eschatology presents three figures playing important roles in the *Qiyāma*: the Mahdi, Jesus, and *Dajjal* (the Antichrist). The Imām will descend into the Holy Land, where he will kill al-Dajjal, the Islamic Antichrist. He will also offer his position to Jesus, who instead will refuse it and worship behind the Imām instead. Then, the Jews and Christians will believe in the Mahdi and submit themselves to God. Jesus will rule over them for forty years, then die, and be buried in Medina with the other prophets.[228] As the Shī'ah traditions, such as al-Majlisī, an-Numani, and at-Tusi, are filled with references on Jesus and His return, the Mahdi is obviously presented as a figure who is more powerful and superior than Jesus.[229] Regarding the Mahdi's immense power, an-Numani declared:

> He is from the Hashemites; the top of the mountain of the Arabs (the best of the Arabs), the sea, to which everyone comes ladling, the safe resort and the pure spring when others become turbid. He is from the people, who do not cower when death hastens, do not weaken when the end approaches and do not recede when the heroes clash. He is always a winner like a lion. He will do away with oppressors and the arrogants. He is a sword of Allah's. He arises from loftiness. His glory emits from a great glorious family. Let none of those who hasten towards seditions and who when saying the evilest of sayers and when keeping silent, fishing in the troubled water, prevents you from paying homage to him." [*sic*][230]

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[228] Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism*, 171; Smith and Haddad, *The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrec*tion, 69.

[229] Surprisingly, the same argument cannot be found in the work of al-Mufīd, *Kitāb al-Irshād*, which was written in the tenth century. See al-Mufīd, *Kitāb al-Irshād,* 524–55.

[230] An-Numani, *Kitāb al-Ghayba: The Book of Occultation*, Ansariyan Publications; [on-line]; accessed June 17, 2017; available from https://www.al-islam.org/kitab-al-ghayba-book-occultation-sheikh-an-numani; Internet. An-Numani continues to describe that "the inhabitant of the heaven and the people of the earth will be happy with his advent. He is a man with bright forehead, big abdomen, wide thighs with a mole on the right thigh and with separated front teeth. He will fill the world with justice after it has been filled with injustice and oppression."

Al-Majlisī recorded the words of the Prophet Muhammad concerning the coming of Jesus:

> An assembly of my Ummah will ceaselessly wage wars in the cause of righteousness and purity until the Day of Judgment. Then Jesus the son of Mary will come down. Their leader will say to him, "Come and lead our prayers." He will say, "Behold, one of yourselves is the leader for the rest, as a token of dignity from Allah for this Ummah."[231]

Al-Majlisī claimed that this *hadīth* is *sahih* even according to Bukhari and Sahih, Sunni's traditionists. However, one should observe that although the two Sunni *ahadīth* affirmed the reliability of this tradition, it does not mean they agreed that this *hadīth* refers to the Mahdi since there is no reference to the name, or the title, of the Twelfth Imām. Al-Majlisī continues to explain the qualification of the one leading the prayer based on the narration of Al-Sheikh Abu Àbdillah Muhammad ibn Yusuf ibn Muhammad al-Shāfi'ī,

> A person will lead the congregation who is the best of them in the recitation of the Qur'ān; and should they be equal in that, their most knowledgeable will lead; and should they be equal in that; their most sapient will lead; and should they be equal in that; the one who has preceded them all in migration will lead; and should they be equal in that, the one who has the most beautiful face will lead . . . since it is established that the Imām is more knowledgeable than Jesus, it is permissible for him to lead him. Likewise, as Jesus knows that the Imām is more knowledgeable than him, he follows him and prays behind him.[232]

In one of his chapters, al-Majlisī defended the possibility of the Mahdi still living. When arguing the Mahdi's everlasting existence, al-Majlisī compared him to Jesus and Elijah who are, in Islamic theology, still living. Al-Majlisī explained,

> The reason that Jesus is living is that the followers of the Evangel and the Torah believe in him and that he will verify the Prophethood of the Master of the Prophets Muhammad (a.s) and will explain the message of the Imām to the believers and

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[231] Al-Majlisī, "Chapter VII: He Leads Jesus in Prayers," in *The Book of Occultation*, 152.

[232] Al-Majlisī, *The Book of Occultation*, 154.

> certify his claims, by praying behind him and helping him and calling the people to the Muhammadan religion. [sic][233]

These are just some of Shī'ah *hadīth* portraying the superiority of the Mahdi over Jesus Christ. It is clear that Shī'ah theologians cover the majority of Jesus' life: his infancy narrative, sacrificial death, ascension, and his return—putting them in place of the life of the Mahdi.

As explained in this chapter, one would understand that the expectation of the coming of the Mahdi in Shī'ah eschatology is firmly rooted in the early history of the sect itself. This chapter provides the encounter between Muhammad with the early Nestorians and how the Prophet perceived his understanding of the person of Christ from heretical groups within early Christianity. Muhammad's teaching on *qiyama* as found in the Qur'ān has greatly influenced the Shī'ah's yearning for the day when the Mahdi will come and restore the true religion of Islam, which is Shī'ah, and redeem the *Ahlul al-bayt* from the oppression. A concise history of the disagreement between Sunni and Shī'ah serves as the basis for understanding their differences in relation to their eschatological hope. The next chapter presents the prevalent eschatological hope of evangelical Christians about the return of Jesus Christ.

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[233] Al-Majlisī, *The Book of Occultation*, 170.

Chapter 3

JESUS CHRIST IN CHRISTIAN ESCHATOLOGY

In 2001, Harvard University Press published a book entitled *The Muslim Jesus: Sayings and Stories in Islamic Literature*, edited by Tarif Khalidi.[1] In the introduction, Khalidi explains that the purpose of his book is "to introduce an image of Jesus little known outside Arabic Islamic culture," and to present it to "those who wish to understand how Jesus was perceived by a religious tradition which greatly revered him but rejected his divinity."[2] Khalidi affirms that the collection of three hundred and three stories and sayings have impacted Muslim perceptions of Christianity and argues that Jesus is "the only prophet in the Qur'ān who is deliberately made to distance himself from the doctrines that his community is said to hold of him."[3] He continues to express that the Christian version of the life and teachings of Jesus presents major doctrinal problems. According to Khalidi, the Qur'ān has frequently addressed these problems.[4]

The role of the qur'ānic Jesus in Islamic eschatology is included in Khalidi's discussion, although not in detail. Jesus will be the major figure in what Khalidi refers to as the apocalyptic and "biblical" *hadīth*. He writes:

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[1] Tarif Khalidi, ed. *The Muslim Jesus: Sayings and Stories in Islamic Literature* (Harvard University Press, 2011).

[2] Ibid., 3.

[3] Ibid., 12.

[4] Ibid.

> The eschatological role of Jesus, the Second Coming, though not very detailed in the Gospels, seems to have captured the imagination of the Eastern churches, whence it may well have filtered into mainstream Muslim dogma. But it must also be emphasized that the Qur'anic Jesus . . . was a principal inspiration for the eschatological. In broad terms, two central actors made their appearance in Muslim eschatology: the Muslim Mahdi (or Messiah) and Jesus. Muslim tradition assigned to each a series of tasks, at the end of which the world would come to an end.[5]

Nevertheless, based on the eschatological verses, Khalidi argues that Jesus "is no better informed than any mortal about when the 'Hour' shall come."[6] Some of these eschatological verses are follows:

> Gabriel met Jesus and said to him, "Peace be upon you, Spirit of God." "And upon you peace, Spirit of God," said Jesus. Then Jesus asked, "O Gabriel, when will the Hour come?" Gabriel's wings fluttered and he replied, "The questioned knows no more about this than the questioner. It has grown heavy in the heavens and the earth; it will only come upon you suddenly." Or else he said, "Only God will reveal it when it is time."[7]

Another verse, which Khalidi also claims as evidence of Jesus' unknowability of the hour, says, "Whenever the Hour was mentioned in the presence of Jesus, he would cry out and say, 'It is not fitting that the son of Mary should remain silent when the Hour is mentioned in his presence.'"[8]

Khalidi's work is one of many examples of how Muslim scholars present their perspective on the eschatological role of Jesus Christ by constructing arguments from non-biblical sources which they claim are more reliable that the Bible itself. *The Muslim*

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[5] Khalidi, *The Muslim Jesus*, 25.

[6] Ibid., 33.

[7] Ibid., 53–4. Khalidi admits that this story "appears to be a recasting" of Sūrah 7:187 with Muhammad being the one who was questioned about the Hour. This verse says, "They ask thee about the (final) Hour—when will be its appointed time? Say: "The knowledge thereof is with my Lord (alone): None but He can reveal as to when it will occur. Heavy were its burden through the heavens and the earth. Only, all of a sudden will it come to you." They ask thee as if thou Wert eager in search thereof: Say: "The knowledge thereof is with Allah (alone), but most men know not."

[8] Ibid.

Jesus presents a Jesus, according to Khalidi, that is similar to Jesus in the Gospels. However, it actually contradicts the New Testament (NT) teachings of Jesus. Therefore, this chapter presents the unity of and continuing message of Jesus as the Messiah, and His return at the end of the world in premillennial eschatology, which serves as the foundation for the comparison of Jesus and the Mahdi to be presented in chapter four.

Readers will find that the teachings of the Bible demonstrate a unified message that Jesus Christ is the promised Messiah in the Old Testament (OT), the incarnate Christ in the Gospels, and the Messiah whose return has been prophesied both in the OT and in the NT. In order to achieve that purpose, this chapter commences with a brief survey of the OT prophecies on the advent of the incarnate Christ. This is followed by the NT claims of Jesus as the Messiah. Then, it continues with the prophecies of His *parousia* as written in selected passages of the NT. This chapter also presents the writings of the church fathers on the return of Christ, and the writings of recent premillennial theologians are surveyed to demonstrate the consistencies of Christian teaching on the return of Christ and His supremacy in the eschaton. It is noteworthy to remind readers that the primary purpose of this chapter is to lay groundwork for a comparison with Islamic eschatology in chapter four, therefore one should not expect this chapter to be an exhaustive presentation of premillennialism.

The Return of Jesus as the Messiah in New Testament Teaching

The foundation and the ultimate authority of evangelical theology rests on the sixty-six inspired books of the Bible.[9] Thus, all aspects of theology should be grounded in

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[9] Hugh D. McDonald, "Authority of the Bible," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* 2nd ed., ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Academics, 2001), 153–54. See also, David S. Dockery and

the teachings of the Bible, including the teachings that Jesus is the Messiah and of the expectation of His return. In addition to the NT, selected OT passages will also be employed whenever necessary.

The *parousia*, the return of Jesus Christ, is an essential teaching of the NT.[10] Donald Hagner rightly explains that the word *parousia* in this context refers "not to the visit or presence of an earthly king, as in the Hellenistic world, but is used technically to refer to the return of Jesus."[11] Similarly, John Nolland explains that "The Christian absolute use of παρουσία for the (second) coming of Jesus ('the Parousia') is based on the use of the word in this absolute manner for the official arrival of a dignitary or for the manifestation of a deity."[12] A comparable description of the meaning of *parousia* in this context comes from William Davies and Dale Allison, in *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, when they argue that this word refers to the "eschatological coming of the Son of man."[13]

David P. Nelson, "Special Revelation," in *A Theology for the Church*, ed. Daniel L. Akin (Nashville: B&H Academics, 2007), 141–44.

[10] Readers will find that this dissertation avoids employing the phrase "the second coming of Christ," or "the second advent" as the reference of the return of Jesus Christ at the end of the world. I would like to thank my former supervisor, Dr. Paige Patterson, for reminding me that this phrase is not in the Bible. A similar argument is also presented by Larry Kreitzer when he explains that "neither phrase is found within the Pauline letters, or anywhere else in the NT for that matter." See Larry J. Kreitzer, "Eschatology II: Paul," in *The IVP Dictionary of the New Testament: A One-Volume Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship*, ed. Daniel G. Reid (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 340.

[11] Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, in *Word Biblical Commentary* vol. 33B, ed. Ralph Martin (Dallas: Word Books, 1995), 688. Here Hagner dismisses Lewis and Demarest's who describe *parousia* is the term that "was used in the Hellenistic world for the arrival of a king or other dignitary." See Gordon R. Lewis and Bruce A. Demarest, *Integrative Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 406.

[12] See John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 960–61.

rn[13] W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Gospel According to Saint Matthew* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 337–38. However, Davies and Allison contend

After Jesus had taught His disciples the signs of the end of time, He foretold the coming of the Son of Man "on the clouds of heaven with power and glory" (Matt 24:30). On the night before His death, Jesus promised the disciples, "I will come again and receive you to myself" (John 14:3). This promise was repeated by the angels as the disciples watched their Lord ascend into heaven: "This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11). Since that time, the early Christians have eagerly awaited the return of Christ. This sentiment was captured in the early Christian prayer, *Maranatha*, "O Lord, come!" (1 Cor 16:22).[14] Gordon Fee rightly asserts, "In the early Christian community the exaltation of the risen Christ carried with it an eager expectation of his return, the *parousia* (coming again) of Christ in full glory."[15]

Early believers' questions about the return of Christ were the reason for Paul's reassuring message in 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18. He also urged believers in Crete to live godly lives while "looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13). John, in the vision he received while exiled on the

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that "arrival" is a correct translation for *parousia*, and not "return." D. A. Carson asserts that while *parousia* can refer to "presence," "arrival," or "coming," it is strictly connected to the glorious "appearing" or "coming" of Jesus at the end of human history. See D. A. Carson, *Matthew,* in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, rev. ed., eds. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 558.

[14] *Maranatha* is the Greek transliteration of the Aramaic phrase, and there are two possible interpretations of this word based on how the word divided in its original language. The first possibility is *marana tha*, which means "Come our Lord!" and the second one is *maran atha*, which means "The Lord has come!" The former indicates the "invocation for the Lord to come," while the latter demonstrates the conviction that the Lord has already come. See Kreitzer, "Eschatology II: Paul," 339–40. Richard Bauckham avers that *Maranatha* is more than just the expectation of the *parousia*, but also "a presentation of religious relationship with the one who is to come, whether or not it was associated with a eucharistic presence from the beginning." See Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Studies on the New Testament's Christology of Divine Identity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 128.

[15] Gordon Fee, *Paul's Christology* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007), 569.

island of Patmos, described in detail the triumph of the returning Christ (Rev 19). The NT is consistent in its emphasis on the certainty of Christ's return.

Jesus as the Fulfillment of Old Testament Messiah

While this dissertation focuses on the eschatological return of Jesus as the Messiah in the NT, one would agree that it is impossible to discuss the term "messiah" without discussing its OT references. The disciples' questions in Matthew 24 and Acts 1:6 are rooted in their understanding and hope of the return of their Messiah as repeatedly prophesied in the OT. It should be remembered that these disciples were not merely devoted Jews who were well versed in the OT, but the ones who gained a deeper understanding about the Hebrew Scripture from Jesus as their rabbi. Throughout His ministry, Jesus pointed to the prophecies in the OT pertaining to His incarnation, death, and glorious eschatological return as the messiah. Some of the examples are the discussion between Jesus and the three disciples following the transfiguration account in Matthew 17, as well as Jesus' reading of the Isaiah scroll in Luke 4:16.

The word "messiah" derives from the Hebrew *māšîah,* which means "anointed, or anointed one," while the root word *māšah* literally means "anoint, spread a liquid."[16] The earliest reference of the term *māšah* is found in Exodus 28:41, when the LORD

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[16] Victor P. Hamilton, "מָשַׁח," in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament,* eds. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 530–31. In the process of anointing a king in the OT, oil was not the only element used; it was rather a mixture of olive oil, myrrh, aloes, and cassia. The king's head and robe were anointed with this type of oil. See Willem A. VanGemeren, *Psalms* in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, rev. ed., eds. Temper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 400.

commanded Moses to anoint Aaron and his sons to be the priests.[17] This word also occurs in 1 Samuel 9:16 when the LORD commanded Samuel to anoint Saul as the king of Israel and later in the anointing of David as king in 2 Samuel 1:14. These anointings, according to Larry Hurtado, "signified that the person was commissioned and approved (by God and the people) for a special office or task."[18] While admitting that the nations surrounding Israel had a similar concept of a messiah, Gerard Van Groningen argues that "the biblical idea of the messiah and his work is divinely revealed" and is significantly different from those of the Near Eastern nations.[19] He further dismissed the idea that the concept of the biblical messiah originates from the Near Eastern views.[20] Van Groningen is not the only one believing that there is a significant difference between the OT messiah and the concept of a messiah in Near Eastern nations. Martin Hengel, in *Studies in Early Christology*, explains:

> The word מָשִׁיחַ refers already in the OT exclusively to God's activity. He is the actor in the 'anointing' carried out in his name. Thus,משיח – χριστός is not simply a 'title of majesty', which one can adopt, but presupposes God's acting on, and through, his eschatological messenger. Therefore, the concept need not possess, *a priori*, a greater theocratic-political, or even militant, content, than the metaphor 'kingdom of God', behind which, to be sure, the politically realized theocracy could also stand.[21]

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[17] David H. Wallace explains that the word "messiah" itself does not appear in the OT, and that the King James Version incorrectly employs the word "messiah" in Dan 9:25. See Daniel Wallace, "Messiah," in *EDT*, 764.

[18] Larry W. Hurtado, "Christ I: Gospels," in *The IVP Dictionary of the New Testament*, 141.

[19] Gerard Van Groningen, "Messiah," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, 523.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Martin Hengel, *Studies in Early Christology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 38.

Similar observation comes from Gordon Johnston who avers that while the term "Messiah" initially was not a technical term for eschatological messiah, "it eventually took on this nuance in the progress of revelation and was used in this more technical sense in second temple period literature."[22] The explanation of the writers above explicates a divine nature in the concept of the messiah in the OT which makes it different than the rest of the nations.

When discussing the role of the Messiah in the OT, David Dockery and David Nelson argue that there exist two different lines of teaching about the Messiah in the OT, which are sometimes "distinct and other times commingled."[23] The first line of the teaching of the Messiah in the OT claims that the Messiah "would be a Redeemer who would restore humankind to a right relationship with God."[24] Pointing to the prophecy in Isaiah 52:13–53:12, regarding the Suffering Servant, they allege that the Messiah "would be an offering for the sins of men and women."[25] The Messiah as the coming King of Israel is the second line of teaching in the OT, and there is a promise from God to His people that the Messiah is "to restore Israel to its rightful place as God's people on earth."[26]

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[22] Gordon Johnston, "Messianic Trajectories in the Royal Psalms," in *Jesus the Messiah: Tracing the Promises, Expectations, and Coming of Israel's King* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2012), 78.

[23] Dockery and Nelson, "Special Revelation," 124.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Dockery and Nelson, "Special Revelation," 124.

[26] Ibid.

Several chapters in the book of Psalms, such as chapters 2, 45, and 110, are known as the Messianic Psalms because of their apparent proclamation of the coming of the Messiah. The allusion in Psalm 2 pertaining to the Messiah who will come to rule the world is clearly presented in this passage. Victor Hamilton argues that one should not limit this text to an enthroned king and notes that it "is a reference to the unique vice-regent, Jesus Christ."[27] William VanGemeren rightly asserts that this is the most quoted Psalm in the NT and "was favored by the apostles as scriptural confirmation of Jesus' messianic office and his expected glorious return with power and authority."[28]

There is no stronger declaration of the coming of the eschatological Messiah than Psalm 45:6, and in Gordon Johnston's words it is "ultimately speaking of the Messiah as God incarnate."[29] As a wedding song, this Psalm was only used in the wedding ceremony of the Davidic kings. The next one is Psalm 110, which was used originally to celebrate the reign of King David. The post-exilic Israelites came to an understanding that the Psalm speaks about the return of the future Messiah, "who would ascend to God's right hand to usher in the eschatological kingdom."[30] The right hand of God, according to George Ladd, "is the place of power, the place of pre-eminence. This has to do with Christ's reign as Messianic King. The right hand is in effect the throne of

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[27] Hamilton, "מָשַׁח," in *TWOT*, 530–31.

[28] VanGemeren, *Psalms*, 90. VanGemeren points out that v. 7 in this Psalm was used by Jesus to introduce the beginning the messianic age. Other than v. 7 that is quoted in Matt 3:17; Mark 1:11, and Luke 3:22, the rest of this Psalm is also cited in many NT passages; see VanGemmeren, *Psalms*, 90–1.

[29] Johnston, "Messianic Trajectories," 84. VanGemeren suggests that readers "first listen to the psalm in the context of Israel and refrain from reading only the relationship of Christ and the church into this text. In this manner, they can appreciate more the blessedness of the rule of the One born of a woman into the lineage of David—Jesus our Messiah." See VanGemeren, *Psalms*, 396.

[30] Johnston, "Messianic Trajectories," 99.

God."[31] The evidence of Christ's relationship to David and that He is the fulfillment of the OT prophecy regarding the everlasting Davidic throne is clear when Jesus cites this Psalm in Luke 20:41–44. Jesus also quotes this Psalm in His answer to the Sanhedrin when questioned about His deity in Luke 22:69, which was considered blasphemous by the Jewish authorities since it implied "his shared equality" with God.[32]

The OT term also shows its kinship to NT messianism where the books of the Prophets employ *māšîah* in relationship to the coming King who will restore the Davidic Kingdom. At least three passages clearly prophesied about the coming of Messiah in the book of Isaiah. Beginning with the prophecy of the coming of "a powerful and victorious eschatological Messiah ruling over an unending kingdom in complete peace" as prophesied in Isaiah 9:1–7.[33] This Messiah, according to Alec Motyer, "will be unchanging in its character (*and peace*), without end in space and time (*for ever*), the fulfilment of the Davidic ideal…"[34] The next one is Isaiah 11:10–16, which according to Johnston is the prophet's anticipation of the coming of a king superior than Hezekiah and claims that this text serves as "the foundation for eschatological messianism."[35] The Suffering Servant passages in Isaiah 49:1–13 and 52:13–53:12 certainly predict the coming of the eschatological messiah.

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[31] George E. Ladd, "Historic Premillennialism," in *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1977), 29.

[32] Darrell Bock, "Messiah/Messianism" in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible,* gen. ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids, Baker Academics, 2005), 505.

[33] Johnston, "Messianic Trajectories in Isaiah," 133–34.

[34] J. Alec Motyer, *Isaiah,* in vol 20 of *Tyndale Old Testament Commentary*, ed. D. J. Wiseman (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 90.

[35] Johnston, "Messianic Trajectories in Isaiah," 154.

Jesus as the Messiah in His Teaching

Peter's Caesarean confession in Matthew 16:16 is significant for understanding the NT's claim of Jesus' divine messianism. The context of this passage is not just important because it is followed by the promise of Jesus building His church on the rock, but because of Jesus' claim of being the Messiah, although He tells the disciples not to tell anyone (Matt 16:20). Jesus also makes another audacious declaration during the Sanhedrin trial recorded in Mark 14:61–62. During His interrogation by the high priest and when asked if He was "the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?" Jesus responds with a strong affirmation: "I am. And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven." One will find that Jesus' response was not just christologically significant, which is affirming His deity, but at the same time is eschatologically significant. The next section will briefly discuss Jesus' messianic claims from NT passages and His eschatological role in the *parousia.*

The Messiah and the Sign of His Return

The discussion pertaining to the sign of Christ's return can be found in the Olivet Discourse recorded in Matthew 24–25, Mark 13, and Luke 21:5–38, although Matthew's account is the most eschatologically comprehensive. Speaking to His disciples on the Mount of Olives, Jesus answers their question about the end times while prophesying the destruction of Jerusalem and the signs of his *parousia.*[36] In their

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[36] Timothy Geddert argues that there are no signs given by Jesus in responding to the disciples' request since there is "not a single event predicted in the chapter is called a sign." He further contends that the word σημεῖον itself cannot be found in Jesus' answer. See Timothy J. Geddert, "Apocalyptic Teaching" in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, eds. Joe B. Green and Scot McKnight (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 22. Similar to Geddert's interpretation, Walvoord contended that Matt 24:5–14 does not provide the sign of the end, but "only signs of progress." See "Christ's Olivet Discourse on the

treatment of the Olivet Discourse, some NT scholars only deal with Mark 13 rather than assessing the other two passages due to their acceptance of Markan priority.[37] The preferred approach of treating the Olivet Discourse, as Craig Blaising argues, should be "canonical, harmonizing the synoptic contributions even though making primary reference to Matthew."[38] Andreas Köstenberger also presents another reason why Matthew and Luke should be highly valued when discussing the Olivet Discourse. In responding to Markan Priority, Köstenberger writes:

> This approach often marginalizes the reality that Matthew and Luke also had access to eyewitness testimony and oral reports that were independent from Mark. Paul's reference to Jesus' Olivet Discourse in 1 Thessalonians 4:15–16 was most likely written even before the Gospel of Mark, which shows that the Olivet Discourse and Jesus' teaching about the end times were well known and widely discussed in the

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Time of the End: Prophecies Fulfilled in the Present Age" in *BSac*, 128 no 511 July 1971, 208. While their arguments seem convincing, a careful reading of the whole passage in the Olivet Discourse will show that there is one particular sign given by Jesus in verse 30. Geddert misses the fact that the word σημεῖον actually appears in v. 30. As Craig Blaising correctly interprets that in this text, "only the appearing of the Son of Man in the sky is designated by the term 'sign' in answer to the disciples' question." See Craig Blaising, "A Pretribulation Response" in *Three Views on the Rapture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010) 156–57.

[37] Markan Priority claims that the Gospel of Mark was the first one to be written and was a source for Matthew and Luke while writing their gospels. This theory was popularized by C. H. Weisse and H. J. Holtzmann in the nineteenth century. See James A. Brooks, *Mark*, in vol. 23 of *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991), 23–5. An example of a scholar holding to Markan Priority is John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005). While Nolland holds to Markan priority, he avoids discussing the debate in his introduction. Nevertheless, when dealing with Matt 24, Nolland clearly states that Matthew used Mark 13 as his "major source." See Nolland, *Matthew*, 956. See also Ben Witherington, *Matthew* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2006). For a classical work on Mark 13, see George Raymond Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Future: An Examination of the Criticism of the Eschatological Discourse, Mark 13 with Special Reference to the Little Apocalypse Theory* (New York: St. Martin Press, 1954). Donald Hagner also states that Mark 13 is "clearly the major source" for Matt 24. See Donald Hagner, *WBC: Matthew 14–28*, 684.

[38] Craig A. Blaising, "A Case for Pretribulation Rapture," in *Three Views on the Rapture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), p. 36 n.18. According to Blaising, the Olivet Discourse is "key in the progressive development of biblical eschatology and is a rich field for study." See Craig Blaising, "The day of the Lord and the seventieth week of Daniel," *BSac* 169, no. 674 (2012): 137.

> early church even before Mark wrote his Gospel, most likely on the basis of Peter's preaching.[39]

Köstenberger further argues that the Olivet Discourse in Luke often "clarifies what might otherwise be difficult to understand in Matthew and Mark, particularly regarding the 'abomination of desolation.'"[40] Hence, treating this important eschatological passage by focusing on a single witness neglects the complete picture of the teaching of Jesus.

The Olivet Discourse is part of the fifth discourse in the book of Matthew and strongly connected to the last part of Matthew 23 where Jesus laments over Jerusalem and predicts the destruction of the Temple. The discussion begins with the disciples[41] expressing their confidence in the *parousia* of their master by presenting the important question pertaining to the time and the sign of His return: "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" (Matt 24:3).

There are three schools of thoughts when it comes to the interpretation of the Olivet Discourse.[42] The first one is *preterist*, which states that everything Jesus said to his disciples was only related to the event in AD 70 when Jerusalem fell to the Roman's Empire. These scholars argue that Jesus gives no predictions pertaining to the end of the age. Nicholas T. Wright, for example, argues that "the main subject remains the fate of

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[39] Andreas Köstenberger, *Jesus and the Future: Understanding What He Taught about the End Times* (Wooster, OH: Weaver Book, 2017), 28.

[40] Köstenberger, *Jesus and the Future*, 32.

[41] According to Robert Gundry, Mark clarifies the names of the disciples who posed the question to Jesus: Peter, James, John, and Andrew (see Mark 13:3) to "assure readers of the reliability of the tradition." See Robert H. Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 736.

[42] For a brief survey of different interpretations on this passage, see D. A. Carson, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 548–57.

the Temple in Jerusalem."[43] The second view is that the Olivet Discourse only predicts about the future and has nothing to do with the fall of Jerusalem, this view is known as *futurist*. Responding to this interpretation, Donald A. Carson rightly observes that, "It is very difficult to imagine that a Christian reader of any of the Synoptics at any period during the first one hundred years of the existence of these documents would fail to see a reference to the destruction of Jerusalem."[44] The last view is that Jesus is both prophesying the destruction of the Temple and His *parousia* at the end of the age. Representing this view is Craig A. Evans who argues that

> Jesus' words only partly pertain to the events and experiences of his followers leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. Jesus' words primarily have in view of the end of the sinful age that would eventually and finally give way to the kingdom of God.[45]

Similarly, Davies and Allison also assert that "the discourse, which freely mixes experience with *topoi*, concerns the past, the present, and the future."[46] The solution of this debate must come from interpreting the question of the disciples that led Jesus to elaborate the discourse about the end times. While most NT commentators believe that the disciples presented only two questions,[47] Walvoord maintained that this verse

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[43] Nicholas T. Wright, *Mark for Everyone* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2001), 178–79.

[44] Carson, *Matthew*, 552.

[45] Craig A. Evans, *Mark 8:27–16.20*, in vol 34B of *Word Biblical Commentary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001), 292.

[46] Davies and Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 331. Davies and Allison added a fourth option which is almost similar to the third view that argues a single prophecy that is fulfilled in two different periods. Hagner also concurs that this discourse speaks about the fall of Jerusalem and the *Parousia* of Son of Man. See Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, 700–02.

[47] For example, see Davies and Allison, *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 331.

contains three questions: 1) "When shall these things be?"; 2) "What shall be the sign of thy coming?"; 3) "What shall be the sign of the end of the age?" He argued that the first question refers to the destruction of the temple while the rest are talking about the end of the age.[48] Walvoord's explanation would help a student of the Bible to see that this passage is dealing with the fall of Jerusalem and the end times.

The Deception of *Pseudo-Christ*. Understanding that the first sign will be the coming of false messiahs "in my name" is important. (Matt 24:5; Mark 13:5; Luke 21:8).[49] Grant Osborne rightly says that this phrase "has twofold thrust—they will come using Jesus' personal name, and also his 'name' or office as Messiah."[50] Craig L. Blomberg presents a similar argument asserting that the phrase "in my name" means "they aim to usurp Jesus' place."[51] Perhaps Leon Morris summarizes it perfectly after analyzing the possibility of interpreting the reason Mark and Luke use the phrase "I am" in this text. Morris argues that since "there is a hint of the divine name about this form of speech" thus, this false messiah "will come close to claiming deity."[52]

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[48] See John F. Walvoord "Christ's Olivet Discourse on the End of the Age," in *BSac*, 128 no. 510 (1971): 109–16.

[49] Only Matthew employs the phrase "I am Christ," while Mark and Luke use the phrase "I am he."

[50] Grant R. Osborne, *Exegetical Commentary on the NT: Matthew*, ed. Clinton E. Arnold (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 873. See also Donald Hagner, *Word Biblical Commentary: Matthew 14–28*, 690–91.

[51] Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew,* in vol. 22 of *New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman Holman, 1992), 353.

[52] Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, in *The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1992), 597.

The NT refers to messianic movements that occurred in the first century. The book of Acts, for example, alludes to three messianic leaders, such as Theudas (5:36), Judas the Galilean (5:37), and the Egyptian (21:38), whose movements disappeared within a short period of time.[53] Moreover, there are several Jewish movements whose leaders were viewed as anointed kings of the Jews, or messiahs, in villages and towns such as Emmaus, Bethlehem, and Sepphoris.[54] Extra biblical material also recount the Simon Bar-Kokhba in the second century AD led a rebellious movement against Rome and was referred to as "ruler" and "prince," and a rabbi even proclaimed that "This is the King Messiah."[55] Thus, the *pseudo-christ* in this passage does not refer to the messianic movements but to the ones who will declare to be the divine-messiah and will claim the eschatological role of Christ.

The Messiah and the Day of the Lord. The approach to the discussion on the "Day of the Lord" in Christian eschatology must be taken in a comprehensive approach.

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[53] Josephus, the Jewish historian, provided some details about these three names. Theudas was a magician who "persuaded a great part of the people to take their effect with them, and follow him to the river Jordan, for he told them he was a prophet, and that he would, by his command, divide the river, and afford them an easy passage over it." See Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 20.97. Judas the Galilean was perhaps one of the leaders of the Zealot movement who took revolt against the census of Quirinius. See J.A. du Rand, "Groups in Jewish National Life in the New Testament Period," in *The New Testament Milieu*, ed. A.B. du Toit, vol. 2, *Guide to the New Testament* (Halfway House: Orion Publishers, 1998).

[54] Richard A. Horsley, *Bandits, Prophets, and Messiahs: Popular Movements at the Time of Jesus* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 116–17.

[55] The name Simon Ben-Kosiba, or Bar Kokhba, literally means "the son of a star" in Aramaic. See "Bar Cochba" in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, eds. F. L. Cross and Elizabeth A. Livingstone (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 158. Craig Evans provides the names of Rabbis other than Rabbi Aqiba who claim Bar Kokhba as messiah: Rabbi Simeon ben Yohai and Rabbi Yohanan ben Torta. Simon attempted to overthrow Rome's rule in Judea in AD 132 but his effort failed three years after that. The hope of the second century Jews to see the Temple rebuilt vanished following the defeat of Simon Bar-Kashiba. See Craig A. Evans "Simon Ben Kosiba" in *Dictionary of the New Testament Backgrounds,* eds. Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 1112–16.

This means that it needs to include the understanding of "Day of the Lord" from the OT texts, the Gospels, and Pauline eschatology.[56] This topic is significant in eschatology since it has been considered "the very heart of the prophetic eschatology."[57]

There are two concepts of "the Day of the Lord" in OT teaching with the first one being a glorious and rejoicing day when "God would intervene on behalf of his people and save them from calamity, righting injustice, and defeating Israel's enemies."[58] Sometimes it is referred to as the day of salvation or restoration as spoken in Joel 2:18–32; 3:18. The second aspect of "the Day of the Lord" indicates the judgment and the outpouring of God's divine wrath towards His rebellious people. The Israelites anticipated this day as the day when Yahweh visited His people to deliver His wrath.[59]

Prophesying the fall of the northern kingdom in 722 BC, Hosea declares that the strength of Israel will be broken in that day (Hos 1:4). Amos describes "the Day of the Lord" as the day when Israel will be punished for transgressions (Amos 3:14), and Amos calls it the day of darkness instead of a day of light (Amos 5:18–20). In proclaiming the destruction of the southern kingdom, Isaiah begins by demonstrating the superiority of the God of Israel over the other nations in the Day of the LORD of hosts

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[56] The OT records no less than 18 times the expression "the Day of the Lord" appears in the prophetic books, and 208 times of similar expressions, such as "on that day." See Elmer Martens, "Day of the Lord, God, Christ, the" in *EDBT*, ed. Walter Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1996), 146–49. Since there are abundant texts in the OT and NT that talk about "the day of the Lord," it is impossible to cover them all in this dissertation. Therefore, only selected passages will be used.

[57] Mark F. Rooker, "The Doctrine of the Future in the Prophets" in *Eschatology: Biblical, Historical, and Practical Approaches*, eds. D. Jeffrey Bingham and Glenn R Kreider (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2016), 179–80.

[58] Larry J. Kreitzer, "Eschatology" in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, eds. Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph Martin (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 259.

[59] Gary M. Burge, "Day of Christ, God, the Lord" in *EDT*, 319–20.

(Isa 2:12). He warns Jerusalem that her devastation is near and will come with "both wrath and fierce anger" (Isa 13:6–9). This text emphasizes "the certainty and decisiveness of the Lord's historical judgment in the future."[60] That day prophesied by Isaiah is the day of weeping and mourning because of their iniquity that cannot be atoned (Isa 22:12–14). Ezekiel pronounces "the day of trouble" when God pours His anger upon Israel for their abomination (Ezek 7:1–27).[61]

While there is no explicit usage of the phrase "the Day of the Lord" in the Gospels, the day of vengeance in Luke's version of the Olivet Discourse is undoubtedly referring to this day (Luke 21:22). The preaching of John the Baptist in Matthew 3:7–12 clearly points to the day of judgement. Jesus' statement in the Olivet Discourse is a clear reference to this day when stating that only the Father knows when that day will come (Matt 24:36). When comforting the daughters of Jerusalem on His way to Calvary, Jesus also prophesied the day when Jerusalem would fall (Luke 23:28–31).[62] Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost is the clearest connection between "the Day of the Lord" in Joel 2:28–32 with the pouring out of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:14–24).

There are perspectives within the evangelical scholars when it comes to the scope of "the Day of the Lord," primarily due to their interpretations of the doctrine of

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[60] Geoffrey W. Grogan, *Isaiah*, in *EBC*, 560.

[61] Other OT text that speak about "the day of the Lord" or similar expressions are Zech 14:1; Mal 3:1. For further survey of "the Day of the Lord" in the prophetic books see J. D. Barker, "The Day of the Lord" in *Dictionary of the OT: Prophets*, ed. J. Gordon McConville (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 132–41.

[62] Darrell L. Bock, "Luke: 9:51–24:53," vol. 2, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the NT* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1996), 1845.

rapture.[63] Blaising provides a convincing argument of how to understand the scope of "the Day of the Lord" by integrating this subject with the book of Daniel, the Olivet Discourse, Paul's letters to the Thessalonians, and the sixth chapter of the book of Revelation.[64] This day, according to 1 Thessalonians 5, will come without any warning during the period of time when people say, "peace and safety" (1Thess 5:2–3). Blaising believes that this perfectly matches the opening of the sixth-seal as described in Revelation 6:12–17, and the voice heard saying, "For the great day of His wrath has come and who is able to stand?"[65] This beginning of the tribulation is at the same time the initiation of "the Day of the Lord." In a similar way, Mark Bailey emphasizes "the day cannot begin before the rapture of the church."[66] Bailey also concludes that the end of "the Day of the Lord" occurs at end of the millennium as described in 2 Peter 3:10.[67]

The day of the Lord in the NT is strongly connected with the *parousia* of Jesus Christ. Kreitzer provides several expressions of "the Day of the Lord" that can be found in the Pauline epistles and stresses that all are used in reference to Jesus Christ.[68] Kreitzer

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[63] For more discussion on the debate pertaining to the scope of "the Day of the Lord" see *Three Views on the Rapture: Pretribulation, Prewrath, or Postribulation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 201–06; 250–51; 268–69.

[64] Blaising, "A Case for Pretribulation Rapture," 58.

[65] Ibid., 59–60. Blaising also argues that the seals in Rev 6 are parallel with the early element of Jesus' Olivet Discourse.

[66] Mark L. Bailey, "The Doctrine of the Future and Dispensationalism" in *Eschatology: Biblical, Historical, and Practical Approaches*, eds. D. Jeffrey Bingham and Glenn R. Kreider (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2016), 392–93.

[67] Ibid.

[68] For the list of these phrases, see Kreitzer, "Eschatology II: Paul" in *The IVP Dictionary of the New Testament*, 339. See also Douglas Moo, "A Case for the Posttribulation Rapture" in *Three Views on the Rapture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 202 n.25.

goes on to say that "We have Paul giving his clearest expression of the future hope for the believer, associating with granting of the resurrection body with the *parousia* of Christ (which is expected very soon, during Paul's life time)."[69] Kreitzer believes that Paul "creatively integrates this OT hope with his own developing Christology" by transforming "the Day of the Lord" into "the Day of Lord Jesus Christ."[70] This, according to Kreitzer, is important because the role of Jesus Christ is as God's final judge.[71] Kreitzer is not alone on this issue, Gordon Fee presents a similar argument that "the Lord" in the phrase "the Day of the Lord" should be understood as Christ and not God the Father because of the Christological significance of 1 Thessalonians 5:2.[72] Fee argues that "the actual wording of this phrase in the Old Testament is 'the Day of Yahweh,' which in oral reading in the Jewish community had become 'the day of Adonai [the Lord].'"[73] Consequently, one must concur that this phrase is one of the evidences that Christ is Yahweh.

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[69] Larry J. Kreitzer, "Eschatology II: Paul" in *The IVP Dictionary of the New Testament,* 340.

[70] Kreitzer, "Eschatology," in *DPHL*, 259. One can find Kreitzer's elaboration of this argument in *Jesus and God in Pauls' Eschatology* (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1987), 125–29. Kreitzer explains the shifts in "Lord" from God to Christ, the shifts in pronouns from referring to God to referring to Christ, and finally the referential shift of the day of the Lord from God to Christ. He traces selected OT passages and compares them to how they are clearly shifted in the NT. For example, Kreitzer argues that the word "righteousness" in Isa 59:17 has shifted to "faith and love" in 1 Thess 5:8. Another example is the shift in the language of Isa 59:20 and Romans 11:26.

[71] Kreitzer, "Eschatology," 265.

[72] Gordon Fee, *The First and Second Letter to the Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 188.

[73] Ibid. See also Michael Vlach, "The Eschatology of the Pauline Epistles" in *The Return of Christ: A Premillennial Perspective* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2011), 248–49.

It can be summarized that, as it is the case with the OT, "the Day of the Lord" is like two sides of the same coin in respect to the teaching of the NT. The first side involves the judgment of Christ on non-believers, while the other side is the day of salvation for believers in Christ. Fee argues that the day is "God's eschatological conclusion to the salvation that has been effected through Christ."[74] Perhaps one statement that serves best to sum up this section comes from Blaising's response to Kenneth Gentry when he argues that, "throughout the NT, the second coming of Jesus is the coming of the Day of the Lord."[75]

The Messiah and the Abomination of Desolation. Various interpretations from evangelical theologians have been written to present their view on Abomination of Desolation, but a thorough exegetical work on this issue was written by Desmond Ford, entitled *The Abomination of Desolation in Biblical Eschatology*.[76] Ford presented four schools of interpretations pertaining to the saying in Daniel 7. The first one is those who believe that this applies only to the fall of Jerusalem that happened in AD 70. The second school, taking the opposite view, are scholars who hold to a strictly futuristic interpretation, believing that the terminology applies only to the end of the Age. The third school of thought comprises theologians who argue that the phrase applies to both events "on the basis that either Christ or the Evangelist blended the themes." The last one, which

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[74] Gordon Fee, *Paul's Christology* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007), 47.

[75] Craig Blaising, "A Premillennial Response" in *Three Views on Millennium and Beyond* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 199), 74.

[76] Desmond Ford, *The Abomination of Desolation in Biblical Eschatology* (Washington D.C.: University Press of America, 1979). Ford is an Australian theologian who studied under F. F. Bruce and wrote his dissertation on this particular subject.

is the position Ford holds, is that the fall of Jerusalem is part of the prophecy of the end of the Age.[77]

The term τὸ βδέλυγμα τῆς ἐρημώσεως itself appears two times in the NT (Mark 13:14; Matt 24:15) and can be translated as "the abomination that causes desolation." The verb βδελύσσομαι refers to "something that is abhorred because it defiles a sacred place"[78] It is certain that Jesus was first referring to the prophecy in the book of Daniel (8:13; 9:27; 11:31; 12:11) which was fulfilled in 168 BC when Antiochus IV Epiphanes erected a statue of Zeus and sacrificed swine's flesh on the altar of Jerusalem temple.[79]

Any interpretation of the Abomination of Desolation must be understood in light of the coming of "the man of sin" who will sit as "God in the temple of God" in 2 Thessalonians 2:3–4. Thus, readers must properly interpret two issues here: "the man of sin" and "the temple of God." Edward Glenny connects the idea of "the man of sin" in this passage to figures like the king of Tyre in Ezekiel 28:1–19 and God in Ezra 38–39.[80] Most recent scholars believe that "the man of sin" is an historical person as Robert

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[77] Ford, *The Abomination of Desolation in Biblical Eschatology*, 62.

[78] William Arndt, et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 172.

[79] "Now on the fifteenth day of Chislev, in the one hundred forty-fifth year, they erected a desolating sacrilege on the altar of burnt offering. They also built altars in the surrounding towns of Judah, and offered incense at the doors of the houses and in the streets." Cited from *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1989), 1 Mac 1:54–55. See also Morris A. Weigelt, "Abomination of Desolation," in *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988), 10. Josephus recorded a similar event that took place in AD 40, when Caligula ordered Petronius to build a statue of him in the temple of Jerusalem. See Josephus, *Antiquities*, 18:261–309.

[80] Edward Glenny, "The Doctrine of the Future in Paul's Writings" in *Eschatology: Biblical, Historical, and Practical Approaches*, eds. D. Jeffrey Bingham and Glenn R Kreider (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2016), 238.

Thomas asserts: "the relationship of this apocalyptic portion of 2 Thessalonians to Christ's *parousia* ('coming') confirms the impression that Paul must be referring to a single historical person."[81] Thomas further argues that "the man of sin" is a new historical figure "whom Satan will energize to do his will in the world."[82] The other interpretation of "the man of sin" comes from Ernest Best who believes that this may be an object instead of a person, like the statutes Caligula built of himself.[83] However, it is difficult to view this as a statute or an object when the Scripture uses the word ἄνθρωπος, which clearly means "a person of either sex, with focus on participation in the human race, *a human being*"[84]

NT scholars present three alternatives for interpreting "the temple of God." The first view argues that the temple of God is referring to the church. Representing this interpretation is George K. Beale, who claims that since the phrase "God's temple" in 2 Thessalonians 2:4 is also used in nine other passages in the NT, and they always refer to Christ or the church, then this phrase should also be interpreted as the church.[85] Among those who propose the second view is Thomas, who believes that "the temple of God" in

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[81] Robert L. Thomas, *1 & 2 Thessalonians,* in vol 12 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 466.

[82] Ibid., 466.

[83] Ernest Beast, *A Commentary on the First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1972), 286–87.

[84] Arndt., *A Greek-English Lexicon,* 81 (Emphasis is original).

[85] See George K. Beale, *1-2 Thessalonians* in *The IVP New Testament Commentary Series,* ed. Grant Osborne, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 207–09.

this text refers to a literal temple of God which will be rebuilt in Jerusalem.[86] Along this line, Michael Martin reminds the reader that this phrase "must be used literally if the passage is to depict an observable, symbolic event the church could recognize as an indication of the nearness of the day of the Lord."[87] The third alternative comes from scholars who view the "temple of God" as "the heavenly sanctuary."[88] One of the proponents of this view is Gene Greene, who builds his argument by tracing the "temple of God" in apocalyptic literature. Green writes:

> As attractive as the identification of the *temple* in 2 Thessalonians 2:4 with the temple in Jerusalem may be, we should ask whether the Thessalonians themselves would have understood the allusion in this way. The events in Jerusalem previously described occurred far from Thessalonica and would have been of little interest to the Macedonians and Romans in that city, even those who had become Christians (the vast majority of the members of this church were Gentiles—1 Thess. 1:9). It may be that the *temple* here referred to is the heavenly sanctuary, which is mentioned a number of times, especially in apocalyptic literature (Ps. 11:4 [10:4]; *1 Enoch* 14:8–25; *2 Bar.* 4:3–6; *T. Levi* 5:1–2).[89]

Although connecting "the temple of God" to the other NT references looks convincing, it is unlikely what Paul has in mind. The third view also presents a difficulty since it assumes that the warfare will be in heaven and not on earth.[90]

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[86] Thomas, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, 464–66.

[87] See also D. Michael Martin, *1, 2 Thessalonians*, in vol. 33 of *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995), 230–38.

[88] Gene L. Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, in *The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 311–13. Ernest Best saw the difficulty in seeing this phrase as the "heavenly temple," see Ernest Best, *A Commentary on the First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1972), 286–87.

[89] Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, 312 (Emphasis is original).

[90] Best, *A Commentary on the First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians,* 287.

It can be summarized that while Jesus is referring to the event that took place approximately two-hundred years earlier, it does not mean that His prophecy has nothing to do with future events. He is including this prophecy to show that a similar event will happen when a "man of sin" comes and defiles "the temple of God." Thus, a proper interpretation of τὸ βδέλυγμα τῆς ἐρημώσεως in the Markan passage is that there will come a new historical figure that will defile the rebuilt temple of God in Jerusalem prior to *parousia.*

The Messiah and His Suffering. Peter's blunt declaration in Caesarea was soon followed by his imprudent action when taking Jesus aside and rebuking his teacher. Jesus was just predicting His suffering and resurrection, which is inconceivable in the eyes of a zealous Jew such as Peter. In fact, Jews expected a heroic and David-like messiah who would restore the glory of Israel as it was during the Davidic reign. They reject the Christian interpretation of Isaiah 53 that the messiah must suffer as "an offering for sin" (Isa 53:10).

Surprisingly, a similar view is held by evangelical theologians such as George Ladd. In his criticism of the dispensational hermeneutics, Ladd rejects the idea of a suffering Messiah in Jewish context.[91] Denying that Isaiah 53 is the prophecy of the Messiah in the OT setting, Ladd argues, "The OT does not make it clear that before Messiah is to come as conqueror and ruler, he must first appear as the humble suffering servant."[92] While convinced that the interpretation of Isaiah 53 should "becomes such

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[91] George Ladd, "Historic Premillennialism," 22. Ladd interprets the church as the new spiritual Israel, which he admits is similar to amillennialism.

[92] Ibid., 23.

only when it is interpreted in light of the Christ event," Ladd argues that the servant is not the Messiah or the Davidic ruling king.[93]

Bock admits that the suffering Messiah is a problematic concept in Jewish eschatology. Concerning the difference between Jewish and Christian interpretations of this passage, Bock rightly explains,

> In this concept of a suffering messiah, the Jesus movement's portrait of Messiah clashed with Jewish expectation, since Judaism had only anticipated a glorious, strictly victorious, and powerful figure. To Jews, a suffering messiah was incongruous, an impossibility. They thought that the nation might suffer, but not their deliverer. However. Jesus' suffering and death make it possible for the deliverer to purchase a people who will serve the Lord.... Having been exalted as Christ, Jesus can bring both deliverance and forgiveness of sins.[94]

Along the same line, Michael Brown describes that Isaiah 53 is "the central prophetic text in the debate concerning Jesus the Messiah."[95] Frank Delitzsch, one of the most respected OT scholars of the twentieth century, explained three possible Jewish interpretations of this passage in *The Prophecies of Isaiah*.[96]

Evangelical theologians, without any doubt, take the Suffering Servant seriously and view it as an important prophecy in the OT pertaining to the crucifixion of

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[93] Ladd, "Historic Premillennialism," 23.

[94] Darrell L. Bock, *A Theology of Luke and Acts: Biblical Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 186.

[95] Michael Brown, "Jewish Interpretations of Isaiah 53" in *The Gospel According to Isaiah 53: Encountering the Suffering Servant in Jewish and Christian Theology*, eds. Darrell L. Bock and Mitch Glaser (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2012), 62–3. In this article, Brown traces the messianic interpretation of Isa. 53 in no less than a dozen rabbinic sources and found that there is even a disagreement among the Jewish rabbis on this passage.

[96] Franz Delitzsch, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, trans. James Martin, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 174–75. In what Delitzsch referred to as a pyramid, the bottom part of the pyramid is the elect nation of Israel as the servant of the Lord, the middle part is the remnant of the righteous within Israel, and the top level is a single Servant who suffers for the true Israel.

the Lord Jesus. As Paul Ferguson states, "that Jesus first came in lowliness, despised and rejected, a man of sorrows, was important for those early believers. But that he would in due course come back in triumphant majesty was just as important."[97] The Suffering Servant, or as some would call him, "the Servant of Yahweh," is attested in the four passages in the book of Isaiah which speak pertaining to the missions and sacrificial death of Jesus Christ.[98] These four passages are Isaiah 42:1–4; 49:1–6; 50:4–9; and 52:13–53:12, which is the one that will be focused on in this text.

Two important issues are raised when it comes to the allusion of this passage in the NT: first, the self-awareness of Jesus as the suffering servant, and second, the teaching of selected NT writers pertaining to fulfillment of this prophecy in the crucifixion of Jesus. The Gospels record numerous verses that can exhibit the self-awareness of Jesus as the Suffering Servant. In the most-known Nicodemus encounter, Jesus uses Isaiah 52:13 to remind this Jewish rabbi that just "as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness," the Son of Man must also be lifted up (John 3:14). When answering the three bewildered disciples following the transfiguration event, Jesus makes a reference to Isaiah 53:3 that "the Son of Man is also about to suffer at their hands" (Matt 17:12). Later on, Jesus explains that "The Son of Man is about to be betrayed into the hands of men, and they will kill Him, and the third day He will be raised up" (Matt 17:22). While praying in Gethsemane, Jesus quotes Isaiah 53:12 to the disciples, that He will be "numbered with the transgressors" (Luke 22:37).

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[97] Paul Ferguson, "Second Coming of Christ" in *EDBT*, 720.

[98] Richard. T. France, "Servant of Yahweh," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, Joel Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall, eds. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity press, 1992), 744–46. France explains that it was Bernhard Duhm, a German scholar, who first isolated these four passages from Isaiah and called it "Servant Songs."

Following His resurrection, on the road to Emmaus Jesus enlightens the two disciples by asking, "was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" (Luke 24:26). This was repeated when He appears to the rest of the disciples: "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day" (Luke 24:46). Michael Wilkins, in his study on the self-awareness of Jesus in the NT, rightly concludes,

> Jesus' own understanding of his mission and death in the light of Isaiah 53 was the root of the early church's understanding. Jesus adopted the general messianic interpretation of Isaiah 53 current in Second Temple Judaism, but he understood his sufferings quite in the light of the Word of God given to him from Isaiah 43:3–4 and 53:11–12. . . . Jesus' understanding of his mission as the Servant was fulfilled in the whole course of obedience in his carrying out the will of his Father.[99]

All of these Scripture references are clear evidence that Jesus was aware that He himself was the Suffering Servant prophesied in Isaiah 53.

Perhaps the longest quotation of Isaiah 53 in the NT can be found in the account of Philip baptizing the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8:26–40. The Scripture explains that the eunuch was reading the whole passage of Isaiah 53 and had difficulty understanding it. For this reason the Holy Spirit brought Philip to his side and expounded the fulfillment of the text in the death of Jesus Christ. In his study of the significance of Isaiah 53 and Acts 8, Bock concludes:

> Not only is Jesus a figure described and predicted centuries in advance, but even the seeming incongruity of his death is a part of that description. Juxtaposing Jesus' humiliation in an unjust crucifixion with God's vindication of Jesus in resurrection

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[99] Michael J. Wilkins, "Isaiah 53 and the Message of Salvation in the Gospels" in *The Gospel According to Isaiah 53: Encountering the Suffering Servant in Jewish and Christian Theology*, eds. Darrell L. Bock and Mitch Glaser (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2012), 131.

> shows where God's vote lies in disputes about who Jesus is. His shame was actually a part of God's divine work to pay a price, even for those who had rejected him.[100]

Craig Evans points out that Paul is actually citing Isaiah 53 in his teaching on justification by faith in Romans 4–5. The apostle is making a reference to Isaiah 53:12 when Jesus "was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification" (Rom 4:25). Adding that Romans 5:19 is another example of Paul's usage of the Suffering Servant, Evans avers "making sinners righteous is exactly what Jesus the Suffering Servant accomplished on the cross."[101]

The teachings of Acts 8 and Romans 4–5 are examples of how the NT writers were clearly convinced that Jesus Christ is the Suffering Servant as described by Isaiah. Evans even argues that Isaiah 53 provides "a significant contribution to the theologies of Peter, Paul, Hebrews, and John."[102] This passage, according to Patterson, provides "the strongest statements to be found anywhere in the Scripture for the substitutionary and vicarious nature of atonement of the Suffering Servant."[103] One should conclude that while the notion of a triumphant and glorious Messiah suffering is objectionable in Jewish theology, this idea is ultimately important in the Christian understanding of the Messiah.

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[100] Darrell L. Bock, "Isaiah 53 in Acts 8" in *The Gospel According to Isaiah 53: Encountering the Suffering Servant in Jewish and Christian Theology*, eds. Darrell L. Bock and Mitch Glaser (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2012), 143.

[101] Craig Evans, "Isaiah 53 in the Letters of Peter, Paul, Hebrews, and John" in *The Gospel According to Isaiah 53: Encountering the Suffering Servant in Jewish and Christian Theology*, eds. Darrell L. Bock and Mitch Glaser (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2012), 161.

[102] Ibid.

[103] Paige Patterson, "The Work of Christ" in *A Theology for the Church*, 556–57.

The Messiah and His Kingdom in the Millennium. A literal understanding of the future kingdom as prophesied in the OT and a literal interpretation of the Greek word χίλια, which means "one thousand years," in Revelation 20 are two important aspects in understanding premillennial theology. The discussion of the reign of Christ in His millennial kingdom will first begin with the millennial interpretation of Revelation 20, then this section will return to the OT in order to comprehend the nature of this kingdom as described in its prophetic books.

Premillennialists take literally the words "one thousand years" (τὰ χίλια ἔτη) which appear six times in Revelation 20 arguing that Christ "will establish and rule over a kingdom on this earth for a millennium, that is, for a thousand years."[104] This eschatological tenet of premillennialism is primarily grounded in their literal interpretation of Revelation 19:11–20:6.[105] In his vision, John saw three important events:

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[104] Blaising, *Three Views on Millennium and Beyond*, 157. Most scholars agree that Rev 20 is the most debated passage in Christian eschatology. Three different interpretations divide Christian eschatology into premillennialism, postmillennialism, and amillennialism, based on their interpretations of "one thousand years." Amillennialism, which prominently came to the scene due to the teaching of Augustine in the fourth century, rejects the idea that the reign of Christ on earth during one thousand years in this passage has to be interpreted literally, since, according to Robert Strimple, it will be an intervention "between the second coming of Christ and the Final Judgment and the new heaven and new earth." See Robert Strimple, "Amillennialism" in *Three Views of Millennium*, 119. The millennium in Rev 20, according to amillennialists, "is not exclusively future but is now in the process of realization." See Anthony A. Hoekema, "Amillennialism," in *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views*, ed. Robert G. Clouse (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1977). Postmillennialists view the one thousand years in Rev 20 to be of "symbolic value, not strictly limited to a literal thousand-year period," and the "numerical value is no more literal than that which affirms God's ownership of cattle on a thousand hills (Ps 50:10). See Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr. "Postmillennialism," in *Three Views of Millennium,* 51–2. Another significant difference between Postmillennialism and Premillennialism is that the reign of Christ, according to the former, will come after "the world eventually is to be Christianized," and the millennium is interpreted as a "long period of righteousness and peace." See Loraine Boettner, "Postmillennialism," in *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views,* 117.

[105] Paige Patterson dismisses the notion that this passage is the only basis of premillennialism. He refers to several OT passages, such as Isa 2:1–5; Isa 4; Joel 3; and Mic 4:1–4, as the important witnesses of the OT. See Paige Patterson, *Revelation*, in vol 39 of *New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2012), 37.

the binding of Satan preceding the millennium, the reign of Christ and His martyrs during the millennium, and Satan temporarily released after the millennium.

The binding of Satan prior to the millennial kingdom will fulfill the worldwide peace prophecies in Micah 4 and Isaiah 2, which are OT prophecies referring to the millennial kingdom in premillennial theology.[106] There is significance to John giving three other names for Satan: the dragon, the serpent of old, and the devil, in Revelation 20:2. Patterson contends that this is not merely to clearly identify Satan, "but to do so in a way that establishes the consummate evil of his being."[107] Scripture gives the reason for binding Satan so "that he might not deceive the nations any longer" (Revelation 20:3). The result is worldwide peace that the world has never seen before, where wild animals such as a wolf and a leopard will dwell together with a lamb and a young goat led by a child.[108]

Following the binding of Satan, Christ and His martyrs will rule the earth during the millennium. The vision of John in Revelation 19:11 echoes the prophecy of Isaiah 9:6–7 which speak of the reign of Christ. When He comes, Christ will be the ultimate ruler on "the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it

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[106] According to Matt Waymeyer these two prophecies in the OT explain the certainty of the reign of Christ from Jerusalem in His intermediate kingdom, the kingdom that will exist between the present age and the eternal state. Christ will demonstrate His power and judge the nations of the world. See Matt Waymeyer, *Amillennialism and the Age to Come: A Premillennial Critique of the Two-Age Model* (The Woodlands, TX: Kress Biblical Resources, 2016), 23.

[107] Patterson, *Revelation*, 352.

[108] "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; And a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze; Their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play by the cobra's hole, and the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper's den." (Isa 11:6–8).

with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever." Walvoord described, that during this millennial kingdom, Christ's glorious person will be "present and visible" in the world in which the glory of the God of Israel will be perfectly displayed in Christ in "abundant measure," and Christ himself will be the focus of worship and spirituality.[109] The truth of Christ, Walvoord furthers explains, will be widely spread all over the world and the spiritual life in this millennial age "will be characterized by holiness and righteousness, joy and peace, the fullness of the Spirit, and the worship of the glorious Christ."[110] This description of Christ's reign during the millennium proves that the Bible provides sufficient information for Christians to understand the natures of the millennial kingdom.

The Return of Christ in Selected Writings of the Church Fathers

Important for evangelical theology are the writings of the early church fathers, who were the first theologians to encounter and interpret the Bible. Two of the apostolic fathers are allegedly known to the apostles personally, such as Clement of Rome, who served as the bishop of Rome and Polycarp, who was a disciple of John.[111] The following section will provide adequate information to demonstrate that the expectation of the return of Christ, in the words of Dockery, "undoubtedly was a strong emphasis in the

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[109] Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom*, 306–09.

[110] Ibid., 315.

[111] Those who argue that Clement was the third bishop of Rome, note that there was an epistle attributed to him according to Eusebius' *Eccleisastical History*. See Eusebius, *Eccleisastical History*, 3.4.10; 3.15; 4.23.11; 5.6.3. However, Michael Holmes rejects the view that Clement was the bishop of Rome by arguing that "the office of monarchical bishop, in the sense intended by this later tradition, does not appear to have existed in Rome at this time." See Michael Holmes, *The Early Church Fathers in English*, 3rd ed., trans. and ed. by Michael Holmes (Grand Rapids: Baker Academics, 2006), 37.

primitive Christian church," and this eschatological hope has always been consistent throughout the centuries.[112] As Brian Daley avers, "early Christian theology developed in a climate of strong, although fluid, eschatological expectations."[113] There are four basic doctrines of eschatology in early Christian belief: the return of Jesus Christ, the bodily resurrection of the dead, the final judgment, and man's eternal fate based upon that judgment.[114]

Anticipation of the return of Christ is stated several times in the final part of *The Didache*.[115] Warning the readers of the coming of the Lord, *The Didache* urges the readers to, "'Watch' over your life: 'do not let your lamps go out and do not be unprepared, but be ready for you do not know the hour when our Lord is coming.'"[116] It

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[112] David S. Dockery, "The Doctrine of the Future: Millennialism in Contemporary Evangelical Theology," in *Eschatology: Biblical, Historical, and Practical Approaches*, eds. D. Jeffrey Bingham and Glenn R Kreider (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2016), 446.

[113] Brian Daley, "Eschatology in the Early Church Fathers," in *Oxford Handbook of Eschatology*, ed. Jerry Walls (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 91.

[114] Bryan M. Liftin, "The Doctrine of the Future in Origen and Athanasius" in *Eschatology: Biblical, Historical, and Practical Approaches*, D. Jeffrey Bingham and Glenn R Kreider, eds. (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2016), 285. Stephen Presley, while agreeing in these four aspects, adds two other aspects of the early church fathers' eschatology: "the future earthly millennial kingdom and the inauguration of the new heavens and the new earth." See Stephen Presley, "The Doctrine of the Future in the Apostolic Fathers, Justin Martyr, and Irenaeus of Lyons," in *Eschatology: Biblical, Historical, and Practical Approaches*, 265–80. In this article, Presley provides a thorough survey of the millenarian hope of the early church fathers.

[115] *The Didache*, or "The Teaching," is the anonymous document that was composed sometime between AD 50 and the third century, as a manual for church order and other ethical commands. The document consists of three parts: 1) Two Ways; 2) Church Order; and 3) Apocalyptic. The first part of *The Didache* was written to help early Christians understand basic teaching of the apostles, such as baptism and life as a Christian. The second part, which is Church Order, describes elements in Christians worship such as baptism, fasting, prayer, and the Lord Supper. The last section is a paragraph of six verses concerning the last days. See M.W. Holmes, "Didache, The," in *The Dictionary of the Later NT and Its Development*, eds. Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 300–02. See also "The Didache," in *The Apostolic Fathers in English*, 157–71.

[116] *The Didache*, 16.1.

continues to declare that, "'The Lord will come, and all his saints with him.' Then the world 'will see the Lord coming upon the clouds of heaven.'"[117]

The letter of *1 Clement* was written to rebuke the Church of Corinth due to the problematic dispute they have in their congregation, possibly during the time of persecution of Domitian (AD 81–96) or Nerva (AD 95–97).[118] The writer of *1 Clement* calls the church to repentance by reminding the church about the threat of persecution and the judgment to come when Christ returns. Quoting Isaiah 13:22 and Malachi 3:1, *1 Clement* writes, "Truly his purpose will be accomplished quickly and suddenly, just as the Scripture testifies, 'He will come quickly and not delay; and the Lord will come suddenly into his temple, even the Holy One whom you expect.'"[119] Concerning the judgment of the Lord, *1 Clement* warns them by saying, "'Behold, the Lord [cometh], and His reward is before His face, to render to every man according to his work.'"[120]

Epistle of Barnabas also discusses the coming of "the Day of the Lord," and stresses that, "The day is near when everything will perish together with the evil one. 'The Lord, and his reward, is near.'"[121] Another second century church father who is indisputably known as the early defender of millenarian expectation was Ireaneus of

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[117] *The Didache*, 16.7–8.

[118] Holmes, *The Apostolic Father in English*, 36–8. See also Joseph Barber Lightfoot and J. R. Harmer, *The Apostolic Fathers* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1891), 3.

[119] *1 Clement*, 23.5.

[120] *1 Clement*, 34.3.

[121] *Epistles of Barnabas*, 21.3

Lyons.[122] In *Against Heresies* he expounded the hope of the early Christians concerning the glorious manifestation of Christ from heaven "'to gather all things in one' and to raise up anew all flesh of the whole human race...."[123] Later on Irenaeus also expected the returning Christ to confirm his Lordship by defeating the Antichrist and through "the destruction of all nations under his rule."[124] Ireneaus' conviction of the role of Christ as judge when He returns was evident when he wrote:

> If then the advent of the Son comes indeed alike to all, but is for the purpose of judging, and separating the believing from the unbelieving, since, as those who believe do His will agreeably to their own choice, and as, [also] agreeably to their own choice, the disobedient do not consent to His doctrine; it is manifest that His Father has made all in a like condition, each person having a choice of his own, and a free understanding; and that He has regard to all things, and exercises a providence over all, "making His sun to rise upon the evil and on the good, and sending rain upon the just and unjust."[6]

In the late second century, a Latin Father by the name of Quintus Septimus Florens Tertullianus,[125] or Tertullian, wrote a defense against the heretic Marcion. In his defense, Tertullian's view on the return of Christ and His millennial kingdom is clearly seen where he explained,

> But we do confess that a kingdom is promised to us upon the earth, although before heaven, only in another state of existence; inasmuch as it will be after the resurrection for a thousand years in the divinely-built city of Jerusalem, "let down from heaven," which the apostle also calls "our mother from above;" . . . After its thousand years are over, within which period is completed the resurrection of the

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[122] Daley, "Eschatology in the Early Church Fathers," 95. See also Presley, "The Doctrine of the Future in the Apostolic Fathers," 275–79.

[123] Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 1.10.1.

[124] Ibid., 5.35.1.

[125] R.C. Kroeger and C. C. Kroeger, "Tertullian" in *EDT*, 1176.

> saints, who rise sooner or later according to their deserts, there will ensue the destruction of the world and the conflagration of all things at the judgment.[126]

Another Church Father whose work evidences his belief in the return of Christ is Justin Martyr. This evidence can be found in his conversation with a Jew named Trypho, in his book known as *Dialogue with Trypho,* which contains one hundred and forty-two chapters. As Daley explains, "Justin frequently lays a great stress on the Christian expectation of coming judgment and reward, and he does so in the familiar terms of Jewish apocalyptic."[127] One of the examples is when he stated:

> But I and others, who are right-minded Christians on all points, are assured that there will be a resurrection of the dead, and a thousand years in Jerusalem, which will then be built, adorned, and enlarged, [as] the prophets Ezekiel and Isaiah and others declare.[128]

Justin also described the reign of Christ in His *parousia* in this way

> He shall come from heaven with glory, when the man of apostasy, who speaks strange things against the Most High, shall venture to do unlawful deeds on the earth against us the Christians, who, having learned the true worship of God from the law, and the word which went forth from Jerusalem by means of the apostles of Jesus, have fled for safety to the God of Jacob and God of Israel;[129]

When the church became the official religion of the Roman Empire in the fourth century AD, and persecution faded, eschatology was no longer the priority in the theology of the church fathers. Issues in Christology such as the Incarnation and the

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[126] Tertullian, "The Five Books against Marcion," in *Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian*, eds. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, trans. Peter Holmes, vol. 3, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 343.

[127] Brian Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church: A Handbook of Patristic Eschatology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1991), 20–1.

[128] Justin Martyr, "Dialogue of Justin with Trypho, a Jew," in *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, eds. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, vol. 1, The Ante-Nicene Fathers (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 239.

[129] Martyr, "Dialogue of Justin with Trypho, 253–54.

Trinity demanded more attention from these early theologians.[130] However, this was not the case for Athanasius of Alexandria. While addressing the Incarnation, Athanasius saw the importance of eschatological teaching in his writing. Concerning the return of Christ and His judgment, Athanasius asserted:

> "Behold, our God recompenseth judgment; He shall come and save us. Then shall the eyes of the blind be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall hear; then shall the lame man leap as a hart, and the tongue of the stammerers shall be plain."[131]

Furthermore, Athanasius wrote:

> And you will also learn about His second glorious and truly divine appearing to us, when no longer in lowliness, but in His own glory,—no longer in humble guise, but in His own magnificence,—He is to come, no more to suffer, but thenceforth to render to all the fruit of His own Cross, that is, the resurrection and incorruption; and no longer to be judged, but to judge all, by what each has done in the body, whether good or evil; where there is laid up for the good the kingdom of heaven, but for them that have done evil everlasting fire and outer darkness.[132]

Philip Schaff summarized the doctrine of the return of Christ in the church fathers' teaching by stating that "The most striking point in the eschatology of the ante-Nicene age is the prominent chiliasm, or millenarianism, that is the belief of a *visible reign of Christ in glory* on earth with the risen saints for a thousand years, before the general resurrection and judgment."[133] Another important assertion of the supremacy of Christ in his return is found in the Apostles' Creed: "He ascended into heaven and sits at

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[130] Bryan M. Liftin, "The Doctrine of the Future in Origen and Athanasius," 293.

[131] *On the Incarnation*, 38. Athanasius of Alexandria, *"On the Incarnation of the Word,"* in *St. Athanasius: Select Works and Letters*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. Archibald T. Robertson, vol. 4, *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Second Series (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1892), 66–7.

[132] *On the Incarnation*, 56.

[133] Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 8 vols. (New York: Scribner's, 1882–1910; reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), 2:614–15; italics added. For more on early Christian eschatology, see Brian E. Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church: A Handbook of Patristic Eschatology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead."

All the references from the writings provided above are clear evidence that the eschatological hope of the church fathers is a continuation of the hope the apostles had after the resurrection of Christ. The fathers' eschatological hope of the return of Christ is evidently grounded in the prophecies of the OT and the writings of the apostles in the NT. The next section will trace the writings of selected premillennial theologians in order to demonstrate that this same assurance and hope of the apostles and the church fathers continues even to contemporary evangelical theologians.

The *Parousia* of Christ in the Writings of Premillennial Theologians

As stated in chapter one, this dissertation takes an approach from the premillennial perspective when addressing issues in Shī'ah eschatology. The present section discusses three reasons why this dissertation prefers premillennialism over postmillennialism or amillennialism. First, some evangelical scholars believe that the early church fathers hold to the premillennialism view.[134] Arguing that premillennialism is the teaching that "is in line with apostolic teaching," Charles L. Feinberg explains "until comparatively recent times the consensus of opinion of those writing on the millennial question was that the early church was premillennial with but few

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[134] Charles E. Hill rejects the idea that all early Christians were premillennials. He argues that "a solidly entrenched and conservative, non-chiliastic eschatology was present in the Church to rival chiliasm from beginning to end." See Charles E. Hill, *Regnum Caelorum: Patterns of Millennial Thought in Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2001), 253.

exceptions."[135] The few exceptions in Feinberg's writing are the influences of Origen, who distanced himself from chiliasm due to "the grossly materialistic character of the view of his day," and Augustine, who had not seen the need of the literal kingdom after Constantine came to power and made Christianity the religion of the empire.[136] A similar argument presented by John F. Walvoord who contended that "all students of the early church agree that premillennialism . . . was the view held by many in the apostolic age."[137]

John Norman Davidson Kelly (J. N. D. Kelly), an Anglican historical theologian, explained that "second century Christian eschatology enters upon a new, rather more mature phase."[138] After tracing the view of Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, and the Epistle of Barnabas, Kelly pointed out the OT studies done by these church fathers and asserted that "the millenarian doctrine was widely popular" during the middle of the second century.[139] A book on systematic theology that has become a standard textbook in many evangelical seminaries in America, *Christian Theology,* is written by a prominent premillennialist theologian, Millard J. Erickson. In this book Erickson argues that based on the evidence from the writing of the early theologians, premillennialism "was

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[135] Charles L. Feinberg, *Millennialism: The Two Major Views* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1982), 93.

[136] Ibid., 95.

[137] Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom*, 5. Walvoord further asserted that "the premillennialism was undisputed for the first ninety years of the second century." Ibid., 120.

[138] John Norman Davidson Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (New York: Harper Collins, 1978), 464–66.

[139] Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 465.

probably the dominant millennial view during the early period of the church."[140] Erickson further writes that "Christians of the first three centuries had a strong expectation of an early return of Christ" and this return will be preceded by a cataclysmic event in this world.[141]

Another premillennialist, Wayne Grudem, who authored the widely read book *Systematic Theology,* avers that premillennialism "has a long history from the earliest centuries onward."[142] Grudem denies that Revelation 20 is the only basis for a future millennium by referring to the idea that Christ will rule the nations "with a rod of iron" in Revelation 2:26–27 and 12:5–6. He also contends that 1 Corinthians 15:23–25 clearly claims the literal reign of Christ until "he has put all his enemies under his feet."[143] Patterson rightly reminds, "If this were the hope of the church in the earliest era and a hope endorsed by those closest to the apostle John, there appears little rationale for embracing another perspective."[144]

The second reason is pertaining to the method of interpretation. The literal-grammatical-historical method of interpretation held by premillennialists is more comparable with the Shī'ah method of interpreting the Qur'ān. Foundational for evangelical theology is *hermeneutics*. Hermeneutics is important because the method of

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[140] Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 1215–16.

[141] Ibid. Elsewhere Erickson claims that premillennialism has its roots in the early church and that the Christians during the apostolic period believe in "the approaching end of the world and parousia of Jesus Christ." See Millard J. Erickson, *Basic Guide to Eschatology: Making Sense to the Millennium* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 94.

[142] Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 1111.

[143] Grudem, *Systematic Theology,* 1130.

[144] Patterson, *Revelation,* 36–7.

interpretation will determine one's view of eschatological issues, as Dwight Pentecost correctly wrote, "No question facing the student of eschatology is more important than the question of the method to be employed in the interpretation of the prophetic Scriptures."[145] Another method of biblical interpretation that has been practiced since the time of the church fathers is allegorical interpretation.[146]

The fundamental difference between premillennialism and amillennialism ever since the time of Augustine is that the former rejects the latter's allegorical method of interpretation of biblical prophecy and vice versa. Karla Pollmann argues that in his later life Augustine became "increasingly interested in the literal meaning of the Bible but never abandoned the spiritual one."[147] Furthermore Pollmann explains that Augustine "wished to integrate literal and spiritual traditions of exegesis; that is his universal hermeneutics aims at integrating everything."[148] Augustine's explanation on when to take the text literally or figuratively can be found in *On Christian Doctrine*:

> But in addition to the foregoing rule, which guards us against taking a metaphorical form of speech as if it were literal, we must also pay heed to that which tells us not to take a literal form of speech as if it were figurative. In the first place, then, we must show the way to find out whether a phrase is literal or figurative. And the way is certainly as follows: Whatever there is in the word of God that cannot, when

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[145] Dwight L. Pentecost, *Things to Come* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1958), 1.

[146] Bernard Ramm's *Protestant Biblical Interpretation* is a classic work on Protestant hermeneutics. The book, which was first published in 1970, provides a thorough survey of the history of interpretation from the first century Jewish method of interpretation until the twentieth century. In Ramm's definition, allegorical interpretation "believes that beneath the letter (*rhētē*) or the obvious (*phanera*) is the real meaning (*hyponoia*) of the passage." See Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1970), 24. Literal interpretation, according to Ramm, "is to accept as basic the literal rendering of the sentences unless by virtue of the nature of the sentence or phrase or clause within the sentence this is not possible." Ibid., 45.

[147] Karla Pollmann, "Hermeneutical Presuppositions" in *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 426.

[148] Ibid., 427.

> taken literally, be referred either to purity of life or soundness of doctrine, you may set down as figurative.[149]

One will see from this statement that Augustine was not consistent in his method of biblical interpretation. When criticizing Augustine's view, Walvoord asserted that although the Bishop of Hippo applied the literal method in other areas of theology such as predestination, hamartiology, salvation, or grace, he preferred to interpret the millennium in Revelation 20 spiritually.[150] Nevertheless, Augustine's allegorical method has been predominantly used since the fourth century and his theology, according to Patterson, was the one that "suppressed the literal understanding of the Apocalypse for more than a thousand years."[151]

One of the impacts of the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century was the rise of the literal interpretation of the Bible. As Ramm explained: "Although historians admit that the West was ripe for the Reformation due to several forces at work in European culture, nevertheless there was a hermeneutical Reformation which preceded the ecclesiastical Reformation."[152] The rise of Protestant liberalism in the nineteenth century sparked evangelical theologians to emphasize again a literal interpretation in their teaching. Pentecost explained literal interpretation as a "method that gives to each word the same exact basic meaning it would have in normal, ordinary, customary usage,

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[149] Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, 3.10.14.

[150] John F. Walvoord, "Millennial Series: Amillennialism from Augustine to Modern Times," *BSac* 106 (1949): 420–31. Ramm claimed that according to Augustine, the allegorical interpretation was the real meaning of the Bible." Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation, 35.*

[151] Patterson, *Revelation*, 29. See also Feinberg, *Millennialism: Two Major Views*, 48.

[152] Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation,* 53–4.

whether employed in writing, speaking or thinking."[153] Patterson also gives a great reminder when he writes,

> An author of a biblical text may certainly disclose truth that reaches to insights given by the Holy Spirit transcending even what the prophet himself comprehended. But to insist that the text meant something differently from that which the author understood is asking far too much. Further, a fair reading of these texts will reveal that the prophets anticipate literal fulfillment—an actual fulfillment that included and focused on Israel as the recipient of the promises of God to Abraham.[154]

Arguing that the Bible itself demonstrates a pattern from the prophecies that have been fulfilled that helps people understand future prophecies, Feinberg claimed that "the only way to know how God will fulfill prophecy in the future is to ascertain how He has done it in the past."[155] There are abundant sources that can be included in the discussion above, but it has to be limited because of the scope of this dissertation. Nonetheless, this section has demonstrated the conviction of premillennial theologians that the proper method of interpretation is the literal interpretation. These theologians agree that the only way to identify the true meaning of what the divine author and human author intended is by reading Scripture literally.

The third reason for preferring premillennialism over the other two is, as the consequences of the literal method of its biblical interpretation, the supremacy and the literal reign of Jesus Christ in *parousia* is well-defined in the premillennialism teaching. After presenting all three millennial views proportionately, Lewis and Demarest in

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[153] Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 9.

[154] Patterson, *Revelation*, 37.

[155] Feinberg, *Millennialism: Two Major Views,* 41. Feinberg's chapter on "Biblical Interpretation," provides an exhaustive premillennial argument against the allegorical method of amillennialism. Ibid., 37–62.

Integrative Theology contend that the return of Christ will be personal, physical, verifiable, public, powerful, incorruptible, and glorious.[156] In a similar way, Erickson explains that Christ's return will be personal, physical, visible, unexpected, and triumphant and glorious.[157] Walvoord's explanation of the interpretation of premillennialism regarding the coming of a messiah perhaps serves best as the evidence when he said that, "They confidently anticipated the coming of a Savior and Deliverer, a Messiah who would be Prophet, Priest, and King. He would deliver them from their enemies and usher in a kingdom of righteousness, peace, and prosperity upon a redeemed earth."[158]

This chapter has demonstrated that the *parousia* of Jesus Christ has been a consistent theme as recorded in the NT. The expectation of the millennial reign of Christ has been one of the themes in the writings of the NT apostles. Despite debate pertaining to the millenarian teaching in the first four centuries, this eschatological hope was conveyed by the early church fathers, whose writings have been the basis for the theological development of Christian theology since. Finally, this chapter has shown that, based on their literal interpretation of the Bible, a number of premillennial theologians have demonstrated their convictions to the authority, visible, and bodily return of Jesus as the Messiah. The premises elaborated in this chapter will then be employed to compare the expectation of the return of the Mahdi in Shī'ah eschatology.

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[156] Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 407. They also argue that the scope of Christ's literal reign is global when "the Lord of all will reenter the space-time world finally to reverse the effects of the Fall and complete his redemptive program on earth." Ibid., 408.

[157] Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1193–97.

[158] Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom*, 114.

Chapter 4

JESUS CHRIST AND THE MAHDI

> The imāms collectively are like Christ for the Shi'i community. Each of them, moreover, embodies one or several aspects of this quasi-Christological personality. On earth, Husayn was the embodiment of the betrayed and suffering martyr, mirroring Christ in his sufferings. The Twelfth Imām, the Mahdī, on the other hand, mirrors in his personality and mission the judging and victorious Christ, the Christ who is to come on the clouds of heaven, whose return the community still awaits with anxious anticipation.[1]

This excerpt from one of the most respected Shī'ah scholars, Mahmoud Ayoub, is an appalling statement to those who are unfamiliar with the Shī'ah concept of the Mahdi. While Islam in general rejects the deity and the death of Jesus Christ, Ayoub explicitly uses Christian belief to describe the nature of Shī'ah imāms. The significance of Ayoub's claims warrants a comparative analysis between Christian and Islamic eschatologies, which is the goal of this dissertation. Chapter three has analyzed the consistencies of Christians' expectation of the return of Christ from the NT teachings, the writings of the church fathers, and the works of premillennial theologians. That research will be employed as the foundation for a comparison of the aspects of these two eschatological perspectives in this chapter.

As demonstrated elsewhere in this dissertation, such comparisons have been discussed previously by Roman Catholic theologians James Bill and John Alden Williams, in their work *Roman Catholics and Shi'i Muslims*. In emphasizing the purpose of their book, Bill and Williams write:

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[1] Mahmoud Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam: A Study of the Devotional Aspects of Āshūrā in Twelver Shī'ism* (New York: Mouton, 1978), 216–17.

> In this book, we focus on the similarities that mark the two faith systems. We are, of course, well aware that each has generated a distinctive civilization and that confrontations have occurred between these civilizations. We have no intentions of understating their differences. Enough has been written about "the clash of civilizations." It is time to address the more interesting question of the community of civilizations. Because differences are commonly known and heavily emphasized, we choose to uncover the roots that remain deeply entangled and intertwined in the histories and philosophies of Christians and Muslims.[2]

The reason for the similarities, Bill and Williams explain, is "the holy personalities at the origin and center of the two religions."[3] Besides portraying the similarities between Jesus Christ and Imām Husayn, Bill and Williams also compare the Virgin Mary and Sayyida Fatima, Muhammad's daughter, who, according to these Catholic writers, "manifest many notable parallels."[4] Unlike the book *Roman Catholics and Shi'i Muslims*, this chapter will point out the differences between doctrines of Christianity and Shī'ah Islam from an evangelical perspective. The comparative analysis of this chapter, then, will contrast Christology and eschatology with the Shī'ah teaching of the allegedly returning Mahdi.

This chapter highlights several doctrines in Christianity similar to those of the Shī'ah, noting the contrasts. First, it will begin by comparing the prophecies of the advent of these two figures as described by their respective holy books. Second, it will contrast the birth of Jesus Christ in Bethlehem as explained in the Gospels and the birth of the Mahdi as written in the Shī'ah *hadīth*. Third, the distinction between the Christian concept of Jesus as the High Priest will be compared to the doctrine of the imāmate in

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[2] James A. Bill and John Alden Williams, *Roman Catholics and Shii Muslims: Prayer, Passion, and Politics* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 3.

[3] Bill and Williams, *Roman Catholics and Shi'i Muslims*, 47.

[4] Ibid.

Shī'ah teaching. Fourth, it will examine the significance of the sinlessness of Christ and the Shī'ah claim of the *ma'sum* of the Mahdi. Fifth, the ascension of Jesus to heaven will be compared to the main theology of the Mahdi, which is the occultation of the Twelfth Imām. Finally, this chapter will contrast the *parousia* of Jesus Christ with the *qiyām* of the Mahdi.

The Prophecies of Bethlehem and the *Nubuwatan* of the Mahdi

The first contrast to note between Christ and the Mahdi involves the prophecies concerning Christ's incarnation in Bethlehem, and the *nubuwatan,* or prophecy, of the birth of the Mahdi, as claimed by Shī'ah writers. Chapter 3 has already provided a brief discussion on the Savior's prophesied birth in Bethlehem. Christians believe Isaiah 7:14, 9:1–7, and Micah 5:2–5 are passages that clearly prophesy the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem. Three facts can be drawn from Isaiah 7:14 alone to prove the accuracy of the fulfillment in the NT. They are: the virgin birth, the Son, and the name of the Son, which is Immanuel. Admittedly, there is much debate among OT scholars pertaining to the Hebrew word *'almâ*, or "virgin," since it literally means "young woman" instead of "virgin."[5] Nevertheless, Matthew 1:18–25 and Luke 1:26–38 suggest that these two possible interpretations, "young woman" or "virgin," can still be applied to Mary.

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[5] J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah* (Leicester, UK: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 84–5. Oswalt translates *'almâ* as a "young woman" of "marriageable age." See John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1–39* in *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 210. Similarly, according to Keil and Delitzsch, *'almâh* refers to "one fully mature, and approaching the time of her marriage." They also argue that while there is another Hebrew word *bethulâh* that can be used for "virgin," both terms can appropriately be employed to describe to "persons who were betrothed and even to such as were married." See C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Isaiah*, vol. VII in *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 217.

The fact that Isaiah writes that it is the mother who will name the Son was not only common practice in the OT, but also indicates that the Holy Spirit had an important role in conceiving the Son and His role in human redemption. As John Oswalt rightly argues,

> This emphasis upon the mother and the corresponding de-emphasis of the father's role cannot help but be suggestive in the shaping of the ultimate understanding of the sign. No man sired by a human father could be the embodiment of "God with us."[6]

These facts are echoed and strengthened two chapters later when Isaiah 9:2–6 foretells the birth of the Son and lists several of His names.[7] The titles of the Son mentioned in this text signify "the ultimate deity of this child-deliverer."[8] The eternality of the Son's throne as the descendant of David is explained and delineated in this text as well.

Micah 5 undeniably predicts the coming of the Messiah. Micah also explicitly describes the location of "the One to be Ruler in Israel," which is Bethlehem Ephrathah (Mic 5:2). Gordon Johnston argues that in this passage Micah describes the Son, who is an ideal descendant of David, as "a veritable David *redivivus*—not a second coming or resurrection of the historical founder of Zion's royal dynasty, but the moral embodiment of David, the ideal king."[9] The naming of the city of Bethlehem in this text, according to

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[6] John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1–39* in *NICOT*, 212.

[7] "Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

[8] Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1–39,* 246–47.

[9] Gordon H. Johnston, "Messianic Trajectories in Amos, Hosea, and Micah," in *Jesus the Messiah: Tracing the Promises, Expectations, and Coming of Israel's King* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2012), 124.

Johnston, signifies "a new beginning for David's house."[10] Another piece of significant evidence in the text is that Micah refers to "the One to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth *are* from of old, from everlasting" (Mic 5:2). This clause is not only referring to the eternality of the Messiah but also to His relationship with Abraham as written in Matthew 1:1.[11]

All the prophecies above support the fact that the birth of Jesus Christ has been clearly foretold in the OT. From the prophecies pertaining to the coming of Christ, we shall now examine the Shī'ah claim regarding the coming of the Mahdi, which allegedly happened since the time of the Prophet Muhammad. *Kitāb al-Ghaibah* records the conversation between Muhammad and his daughter, Fatimah, in which the prophet reportedly said,

> 'O Fatimah, we, the Household, have been given six qualities, none of the predecessors has been given one of them, nor anyone of the coming ones will attain them. Our apostle is the best of the apostles, and he is your father; our successor is the best of the successors, and he is your husband; our martyr is the best of the martyrs, and he is Hamzah, your father's uncle; from us are the two heirs of this Ummah, and they are your sons al-Hasan and al-Husain; and from us is the Mahdi of the Ummah, behind whom Jesus will perform prayers.' Then he touched Husain's shoulder and said 'From him is the Mahdi of the Ummah.'[12]

The prophecy of the coming of the Mahdi came from Àlī in one of his sermons when he stated:

> He will be wearing the armour of wisdom, which he will have secured with all its conditions, such as full attention towards it, its (complete) knowledge and exclusive devotion to it. For him it is like a thing which he had lost and which he was then

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[10] Gordon H. Johnston, "Messianic Trajectories in Amos, Hosea, and Micah," in *Jesus the Messiah*, 124.

[11] Kenneth L. Barker, *Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, in vol. 20 of *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 98.

[12] Al-Majlisī, *Kitāb al-Ghaibah*, Chapter IX, 158.

> seeking, or a need which he was trying to fulfil. If Islam is in trouble he will feel forlon [*sic*] like a traveller and like a (tired) camel beating the end of its tail and with its neck flattened on the ground. He is the last of Allāh's proofs and one of the vicegerents of His prophets.[13]

It appears that Àlī's description of the Mahdi in this sermon is different than the later Shī'ah's. One will find that in this sermon the Mahdi is not portrayed as a powerful and victorious figure who will deliver his followers, but instead will be rejected and defeated. In his other sermon, Àlī, who was enraged with the faithlessness of his followers, rebuked them with this rhetorical question:

> O' people! I have divulged to you advice which the prophets used to preach before their peoples, and I have conveyed to you what the vicegerents (of the prophets) conveyed to those coming after them. I tried to train you with my whip but you could not be straightened. I drove you with admonition but you did not acquire proper behavior. May Allah deal with you! Do you want an Imām other than me to take you on the (right) path, and show you the correct way?[14]

This last sentence provides no indication that the first imām had any knowledge about the imāmate in the future. However, *Kitāb al-Ghaibah* argues that Àlī has prophesied about the Mahdi when he declared to his son, "The ninth from your sons, O' Husain, is the Establisher of the Right (*al-Qā'im bil-Haqq*), the Manifester of the Religion and the Deliverer of Justice."[15] Àlī purportedly knew the occultation of the Twelfth Imām and reminded the Shī'ah that:

> Our Qā'im will have an occultation the duration of which is long. As if I see the Shī'a, roving about like the cattle that are searching for pasture and are not finding it. Behold, whoever from them stays firm on his religion and will not become stone-

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[13] Imām Álī, *Nahj Al-Balāghah: Selection from Sermons, Letters, and Sayings of Amir Al-Mu'minin; Álī ibn Abi Talib (A.S)* vol. 1 trans. Sayyid Ali Reza (Qum, Iran: Ansariyan Publication, 2011), 682.

[14] Imām Álī, *Nahj Al-Balāghah,* 682.

[15] Al-Majlisī, *Kitāb al-Ghaibah*, Chapter VII, 178.

> hearted because of the length of the occultation of his imām, he will be with me in my rank on the Day of Judgment.[16]

The concealment of the Mahdi's birth, according to al-Majlisī, has been known to the second imām, Hasan. When rebuking his followers who were upset with his decision to pledge an allegiance to the Mu'āwiyah, Hasan asserted, "For Allah, the Exalted, will hide his birth and conceal his person, so there will not be any commitment of allegiance on his neck, for anyone when he rises."[17] Al-Majlisī also recorded a similar statement from the third imām, Husayn, pertaining to the concealment of the birth of the Mahdi when he declared, "The birth of our Qā'im will be hidden from the people, so they will say that he is not born yet. He will rise at the time of his rise without any pledge of allegiance to anyone on his shoulders."[18] It could be noted that the wordings of the prophecies from these two brothers are almost exactly the same.

The Shī'ah version of the prophecy pertaining to the coming of Christ and His role in assisting the Mahdi in prayer has been stated as early as Imām Hasan when the second imām declared that Jesus, the son of Mary, will pray behind the Qā'im.[19] This teaching continued during the time of the fifth imām, al-Bāqir, in his affirmation of the

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[16] Al-Majlisī, *Kitāb al-Ghaibah*, Chapter VII, 178.

[17] Ibid., 198.

[18] Ibid., 202.

[19] Ibid., 198.

coming of the Mahdi. "The Twelfth Imām is the one behind whom Jesus the son of Mary (a.s)[20] will perform prayers. You must uphold his conduct and the Noble Qur'ān."[21]

The well-known *hadīth* concerning the coming of the Mahdi and his role on earth was given by the eighth imām, al-Ridā, and states:

> Even if not more than one day should remain from the world, Allah will prolong that day so much that he will rise and fill the world with equity just as it will be full of injustice. As for when it will happen, that is to describe its time, and my father has narrated to me through his forefathers through Prince of the Believers (a.s) that the Apostle (a.s) was asked, 'O' Messenger of Allah, when is the *Qā'im* from your progeny going to rise?' He said, "His example is like the example of the Hour: None but He shall manifest it at its time. It will be momentous in the heavens and the earth. It will not come on you but asudden[*sic*]."[22]

The ninth imām, at-Taqī, also made a similar prophecy regarding the role of the Mahdi on earth.[23]

Although the Shī'ah would argue that there are numerous accounts on the Mahdi's coming recorded in their *hadīth,* the Qur'ān provides little information that can be used to verify these prophecies. Two prominent Qur'ānic texts employed in Shī'ah

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[20] The abbreviation (a.s) is short form of *'alayhi as-salām,* which means "peace be upon him." Sometimes Islamic literature will show (p.b.u.h.) instead of (a.s). Other than Jesus and Muhammad, all the prophets and imāms are given this title as well.

[21] Al-Majlisī, *Kitāb al-Ghaibah*, Chapter X, 206.

[22] Ibid., 228. [Emphasis is original].

[23] Ibid., 230. In this *hadīth*, At-Taqī declared, "He will fill the earth with equity and justice, as it will be replete with injustice and oppression. Allah, the Exalted, will rectify his order in one night, as He rectified the order of His Converser Moses (a.s) who went to fetch some fore for his family and returned a prophet, an apostle."

argumentation about the Mahdi can be found in Sūrah 3:55[24] and Sūrah 43:61.[25] Since the name "Jesus" appears in all major Qur'ān translations, it is obvious that this verse talks about Jesus. However, in regards to the Islamic eschatology, most attention is given to the latter verse. The interpretation of the latter verse warrants a special discussion since Qur'ānic commentators agree that the word "*hū*" in "*innahū*" refer to Jesus Christ, and not the Mahdi as claimed by the Shī'ah.

According to Riffat Hassan, the personal pronoun "*hū*" in Sūrah 43:61 could refer to Muhammad, the Qur'ān, or Jesus.[26] In his commentary, Yusuf Àlī asserts that this verse indicates "the second coming of Jesus in the Last Day just before the Resurrection."[27] The affirmation that the word "*innahū*" in this verse referring to Jesus comes from one of the most respected commentators of the Qur'ān, Ibn Kathīr, who wrote that Jesus will be "a known sign for the Hour," and he "will descend before the Day of Resurrection as a just ruler and fair judge." The sending down of Jesus, according to *Tafsir al-Jalālayn*, is the "portent of the Hour."[28] Surprisingly, the same assertion is

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[24] "Behold! Allah said: 'O Jesus! I will take thee and raise thee to Myself and clear thee (of the falsehoods) of those who blaspheme; I will make those who follow thee superior to those who reject faith, to the Day of Resurrection: Then shall ye all return unto me, and I will judge between you of the matters wherein ye dispute.'"

[25] "And (Jesus) shall be a Sign (for the coming of) the Hour (of Judgment): therefore have no doubt about the (Hour), but follow ye Me: this is a Straight Way."

[26] Riffat Hasan, "Messianism and Islam," in *JES 22*, no 2 (1985), 263–64.

[27] Yusuf Àlī, *The Holy Qur'an: Translation and Commentary*, 2nd ed. (New York: American Trust Publications, 1977), 1337.

[28] Jalāl al-Dīn al Mahallī and Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūtī, *Tafsir al-Jalālayn: Great Commentaries on the Holy Qur'an,* trans. by Feras Hamza (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2008), 471.

also made by Shī'ah commentators such as Seyyed Hossein Nasr in *The Study Qurān.* In his commentary on Sūrah 43:61, Nasr explains:

> In traditional Islamic eschatology, Jesus' return to earth is among the signs of the end of time. The Prophet is reported to have said, "One of the signs of the Hour will be the appearance of Jesus the son of Mary before the Day of Resurrection" at which point it is said that he will fight the Antichrist (*al-Dajjāl*), eventually die, and be resurrected like other mortals.[29]

One would think Nasr would include the Mahdi in his discussion on this verse. It appears from the discussion above that the prophecies of the Mahdi's return can only be verified from the Shī'ah tradition but not from the qur'ānic interpretation.

It is also worth noting that while the translations refer to Jesus, Muslim scholars do not automatically believe that Jesus is the coming Messiah. Samir Khalil Samir, for example, in his article "The Theological Christian Influence," contends that Christ "is not *the* knowledge of the Hour, which is reserved for God, as the Qur'ān repeats, echoing the Gospels. Likewise, Jesus is not the judge of the Last Day, a position reserved for God."[30] Jesus, in Samir's argument, is only the "'sign' (*'alam*) and 'knowledge' (*'ilm*) of the Hour."[31] However, Samir goes on by saying that Christ "is the expected Messiah (*al-mahdī al-muntazar*) who will come to earth from the presence of God, as an announcer of the final judgment."[32] The purpose of the coming of Jesus, in

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[29] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Study Qurān: A New Translation and Commentary* (New York: HarperCollins, 2015): 58437–58439. Kindle.

[30] Samir Khalil Samir, "The Theological Christian Influence," in *The Qur'ān in Its Historical Context*, ed. Gabriel Said Reynolds (New York: Routledge, 2008), 158. See also Riffat Hassan, "Messianism and Islam," 264.

[31] Samir, "The Theological Christian Influence," 158.

[32] Ibid.

Hassan's interpretation, is "defending himself staunchly against the charge that he claimed divinity for himself or his mother," as mentioned in Sūrah 5:116–117.[33] The interpretation of Samir and Hassan on the role of Jesus here contradicts that of Ibn Kathīr above. Nonetheless, the discussion above shows that Sūrah 43:61 is not a prophecy concerning the coming of the Mahdi as claimed by the Shī'ah.

The OT prophecies pertaining to the advent of Christ, on the other hand, although not provided in detail, are sufficient to prove the teaching of the birth of Christ within the Christian faith. The naming of locations such as Bethlehem of Ephrathah and Judea are examples of the reliability of these prophecies. The OT also provides information about the woman who will be the mother of the Messiah, a virgin who is from the house of David.

The Incarnation of Jesus and the Birth of the Mahdi

The long-awaited expectation of OT prophecies pertaining to the coming of the Savior of the world was finally fulfilled in Bethlehem. The infancy narratives in Matthew and Luke are sufficient to understand that God's plan for the Messiah to come and deliver His people from the bondage of sins is progressively revealed. These NT accounts of the birth of Christ accurately depict every single prophecy in the OT related to this event.

The reason for employing the term "incarnation" instead of "birth" in this section is to argue that the fulfillment of OT prophecies in Bethlehem is beyond the birth

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[33] Hassan, "Messianism and Islam," 264.

of a human baby. As Gordon Lewis and Bruce Demarest explain "the uniqueness of Jesus' birth was a 'sign' that he was not only a human son but also the long-awaited God-sent Messiah on a special mission."[34] Incarnation in Christian theology, as described by Robert Reymond, is "the act whereby the eternal Son of God, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, without ceasing to be what he is, God the Son, took into union with himself what he before that act did not possess, a human nature."[35] Therefore the doctrine of the virgin birth is central to a Christian understanding of the incarnation. As Daniel Akin explains, "The Incarnation teaches that God became man in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. The virgin birth emphasizes both the reality of Jesus' humanity and his divinity as God's Son."[36]

It is important to emphasize that the Christian teaching of the miraculous birth of Christ is strictly limited to the concept of the virgin birth. This means that the conception formed in Mary's womb is of the Holy Spirit and without any involvement of a human father. However, Christianity rejects any claim that the miraculous act occurred in the birth itself as some believe,[37] or the alleged miraculous act of baby Jesus as exhibited in the Qur'ān.[38]

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[34] Gordon Lewis and Bruce Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 273.

[35] Robert L. Reymond, "Incarnation," in *EDT*, 601.

[36] Daniel L. Akin, "The Person of Christ," in *A Theology for the Church*, 510.

[37] Erickson rejects the Catholic concept of "miraculous Caesarean section" during the birth of Christ, meaning that the baby Jesus "simply passed through the wall of Mary's uterus instead of being delivered through the normal birth canal." See Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology,* 2nd. ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1998), 759.

[38] The nineteenth chapter of the Qur'ān, or Sūrah al-Maryam, contains story of the baby Jesus allegedly speaking from the cradle. Sūrah 19:29–33 declares, "But she pointed to the babe. They said: 'How can we talk to one who is a child in the cradle?' He said: 'I am indeed a servant of Allah: He hath

Concerning the importance of the virgin birth in understanding the deity of Christ, Erickson reminds his readers that:

> On this basis, the virgin birth was not necessary ontologically, that is, the virgin birth was not necessary for Jesus to be God. It is, however, necessary epistemologically, that is, in order for us to know that he is God.[39]

Along this line, Ben Witherington III avers that the virgin birth signifies not only that Jesus the Son of God was through the Holy Spirit, but "that Jesus was a unique person who was the product of both the divine and the human in a manner unlike any other before or since."[40]

The virgin birth also explains the relationship between God and humans as His creation, as Akin writes that "God is not so transcendent as to be 'wholly other' and hence utterly unknowable to his creatures."[41] The effect of the fall of man in Genesis 3 is that the relationship between God and man is broken, and as a result there is a need for a sinless Savior because redemption cannot be achieved by the works of a sinful human. Hence, the virgin birth is not only a Christological necessity but also soteriological. Lewis and Demarest emphasize,

> Because of its significance, the teaching of Christ's virgin birth is indispensable to a biblically based Christology and Soteriology (the doctrine of salvation). Although

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given me revelation and made me a prophet; And He hath made me blessed wheresoever I be, and hath enjoined on me Prayer and Charity as long as I live; (He) hath made me kind to my mother, and not overbearing or miserable; So peace is on me the day I was born, the day that I die, and the day that I shall be raised up to life (again)!'" The references of "servant" and "prophet" in this passage have been used by the Moslems to ground their argument on the humanity of Jesus alleging that he was not more than a messenger and a prophet.

[39] Erickson, *Christian Theology,* 760.

[40] Ben Witherington III, "Birth of Jesus," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, eds. Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight and I. Howard Marshall (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1992), 72.

[41] Daniel L. Akin, *Christology: The Study of Christ* (Rainer Publishing, 2013), 63–4, Kindle.

> we can imagine other ways by which God could supernaturally have kept Jesus sinless, in actuality the sign of the virgin birth is a historical nonnegotiable.[42]

Furthermore, Lewis and Demarest explain that the virgin birth, which is the inauguration of Jesus' redemptive mission, denotes that Jesus is not part of the "depraved, condemned, and alienated Adamic race but the head of a new order composed of those who have become new creatures by God's grace."[43]

After discussing the incarnation of Christ in Christian theology, we shall now observe the miraculous birth of the Mahdi as claimed by the Shī'ah traditions. A careful reading of Shī'ah's account of the birth of the Mahdi will show that there are both spiritual and physical births of the imām. Spiritually, the Mahdi and the other imāms, were created "as forms of light singing the praise of God long before the material world came into being."[44] In explaining the uniqueness of the creation of the imāms, the sixth imām, Ja'far, explained, "Allāh, the High, created fourteen lights fourteen thousand years before He created the creation. They are our spirits."[45] These fourteen lights are Muhammad, Fātimah, and the twelve imāms.[46] God, explains Sachedina further, "turned his face towards the world, and His glance generated the *ahl al-bayt*, who are regarded as

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[42] Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 274.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism*, 71.

[45] Al-Majlisī, *Kitāb al-Ghaibah*, Chapter XI, 214.

[46] Ibid.

the true source of divine mercy."[47] This Shī'ah belief affirms the distinctiveness of the imāms compared to other creations.

As observed before, there are also miraculous aspects in the physical birth of the Mahdi. The Shī'ah believe that the infant was born with his umbilical cord already detached, circumcised and even spoke to his mother at his birth.[48] Although the description of these accounts varies, Shī'ah contend that this is the unique sign of the imāmate since similar events occurred during the birth of the other imāms.[49] The nineteenth chapter of the Qur'ān describes Jesus speaking from his cradle and admitting to his mother that he was only a messenger. This Qur'ānic version of Jesus' birth has inspired Shī'ah traditionists to find the similarity between the Mahdi's birth and that of Christ, in which Shaykh al-Mufīd explained:

> God endowed him with wisdom and distinction of speech. He made him a sign to the worlds. He endowed him with wisdom as He had endowed John the Baptist while still a boy. He made him an Imam while still in the state of apparent childhood just as He made Jesus, son of Mary, a prophet in the cradle.[50]

In a similar way, Sachedina writes that the birth of the Mahdi is "as miraculous as the birth of Moses or Jesus, and even more significant."[51] This similarity, Sachedina further

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[47] Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism*, 71.

[48] The Twelfth Imām, in Shī'ah tradition, was not the only one who was born with the umbilical cord detached and circumcised. Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi alleges that the other imāms were also born in the same way. See Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shi'ism: The Sources of Esotericism in Islam* (Albany: New York, State University of New York Press, 1994), 57. See also Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam* (New York: Yale University Press, 1985), 23.

[49] Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide*, 56–7.

[50] Al-Mufīd, *Kitāb Al-Irshād*, 524.

[51] Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism*, 71.

states, is due to the fact that both Jesus and the Mahdi were the *hujja* (proof) of God, they speak with the authority of grown men.[52] Amir-Moezzi admits that the narrative of the virgin birth in the Gospel had some influence on the story of the Mahdi's miraculous conception when he writes:

> The case of Jesus Christ was of course known by the Arabs, but it constituted an exception, a miracle that justly proved the prophetic mission of Jesus and his selection as the Word of God. Imāmite tradition, in taking up the basic elements of a Christology known by the Arabs, introduces this doctrine, well known by several previous religious traditions, into the heart of Islam: namely, that the bodies of the great universal teachers are the results of causes with celestial origins.[53]

However, Amir-Moezzi claims that the virgin birth is the result of celestial origins, which is different than what the Christians believe.

The discussion presented above demonstrates three significant differences between the incarnation of Christ in Christianity and the birth of the Mahdi in Shī'ah. First, the infancy narratives found in Matthew and Luke provide no evidence of any miraculous act performed by Jesus as a newborn baby while Shī'ah traditions concur that the Twelfth Imām was able to speak moments after he was born. Although the Christian doctrine of the virgin birth is problematic to some and even frequently challenged, the Bible sufficiently proves the possibility of this miracle.[54] As for the newborn baby to speak and to recite Qur'ānic verses, however, the Shī'ah traditions vary in describing this story.

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[52] Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism*, 71.

[53] Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide*, 58.

[54] For a brief discussion on the challenge and response to the virgin birth, see Lee Strobel, *The Case for the Real Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 178–87.

Another variance in Shī'ah accounts on the birth of the Mahdi concerns the concealment of the Mahdi's birth as recorded by some sources. Al-Majlisī, for example, contended that it was Hasan, the second imām, who asserted that "Allah, the Exalted, will hide his birth . . . ."[55] This is echoed by the tradition attributed to Husayn, the third imām, who wrote that, "The birth of our Qā'im will be hidden from the people, so they will say that he is not born yet."[56] This concealment, according to Al-Tusi, "was not an extraordinary event" since characters such as Ibrahim (Abraham) and Moses were also concealed in their births.[57] These traditions demonstrate differences in the Shī'ah's description of the Mahdi's birth.

The third difference is concerning the unity of the message between these two accounts. There is harmony and continuity in the biblical message pertaining to the incarnation of Jesus Christ within Christianity. The Bible is not ambiguous in presenting the fact that Jesus, who was born in Bethlehem, is the fulfillment of OT prophecies.[58] On the other hand, Shī'ah theologians admit that not only does the story of the birth of the Mahdi vary significantly in its details, Sachedina and Momen point to the fact that the Shī'ah community branched out into several factions with each party claiming the right to bear the name Mahdi. Momen asserts that the confusion within the Shī'ah community

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[55] Al-Majlisī, *Kitāb al-Ghaibah*, Chapter XI, 198.

[56] Ibid., 202.

[57] Abu-Ja'far Muhammad ibn al-Hasan ibn al-Hasan al-Tusi, *Book of Occultation* (Iran: Ansariyan Publications, 2011): 4602–4608, Kindle.

[58] Although there are NT apocryphal books, none of them challenge the reliability of the infancy account in Matthew and Luke.

following the birth of the Twelfth Imām resulted in the emergence of as many as twenty new Shī'ah sects.[59]

The Shī'ah claims (of the creation of the imāms long before the earth was created) pose a significant problem as well, since they are in absolute contradiction with the doctrine of creation taught in the Qur'ān. There is no reference to the creation of the imāms when Sūrah 7:54 describes the creation of the sun, the moon, and the stars.[60] While explaining the creation of the angels and their obligation to worship man, the Qur'ān provides no allusion to the imāms who are said to before the creation.[61] It is also interesting to see that the Qur'ān does not mention the imāms in one of the important events in Sūrah 2:34, which describes the fall of Satan.[62] If the Shī'ah doctrine of the imāmate were true and the imāms were created before the creation, it means the imāms were present when God commanded the angels to prostrate before Adam. The question

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[59] Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam*, 59–60. See also Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism*, 52–56.

[60] Sūrah 7:54 declares, "Your Guardian-Lord is Allah, Who created the heavens and the earth in six days, and is firmly established on the throne (of authority): He draweth the night as a veil over the day, each seeking the other in rapid succession: He created the sun, the moon, and the stars, (all) governed by laws under His command. Is it not His to create and to govern? Blessed be Allah, the Cherisher and Sustainer of the worlds!" Another verse on the creation of seven firmaments does not show any reference on the creation of the imāms. See Sūrah 41:12, "So He completed them as seven firmaments in two days, and He assigned to each heaven its duty and command. And We adorned the lower heaven with lights, and (provided it) with guard. Such is the Decree of (Him) the Exalted in Might, Full of Knowledge." See also Sūrah 32:4; 21:22.

[61] Sūrah 38:71–76 asserts, "Behold, thy Lord said to the angels: 'I am about to create man from clay: 'When I have fashioned him (in due proportion) and breathed into him of My spirit, fall ye down in obeisance unto him.' So the angels prostrated themselves, all of them together: Not so Iblis: he was haughty, and became one of those who reject Faith. (Allah) said: 'O Iblis! What prevents thee from prostrating thyself to one whom I have created with my hands? Art thou haughty? Or art thou one of the high (and mighty) ones?' (Iblis) said: 'I am better than he: thou createdst [*sic*] me from fire, and him thou createdst [*sic*] from clay'". See also Sūrah 27:60–64. *Iblis* is the Arabic word for Satan

[62] Sūrah 2:34 declares, "And behold, we said to the angels: 'Bow down to Adam' and they bowed down. Not so Iblis: he refused and was haughty: He was of those who reject Faith."

one should ask is: Would not God have commanded the angels to worship the imāms instead of Adam? A question to be asked then is whether the doctrine of the imāmate in Shī'ah theology and its distinctiveness is not derived from a literal understanding of qur'ānic teaching.

The Imāmate in Shī'ah and Jesus as the High Priest

Shī'ah scholars believe that the beginning of the doctrine of the imāmate was first announced by Muhammad in Ghadīr Khumm when the Muslim Prophet introduced Àlī as his successor.[63] Later on, in one of the letters to his followers, Àlī described what he believed about the divine leaders:

> The riser has risen, the sparkler has sparkled, the appearer has appeared and the curved has been straightened. Allah has replaced one people with another and one day with another. We awaited these changes as the famine-stricken await the rain. Certainly the Imāms are the vicegerents of Allah over His creatures and they make the creatures know Allah. No one will enter Paradise except he who knows them and knows Him, and no one will enter Hell except he who denies them and denies Him.[64]

Shī'ah and Sunni scholars agree that the Shī'ah doctrine of the imāmate is the departing issue between these two branches of Islam. Shī'ah scholars, such as Ayatollah Muhammad Taqi Misbah-Yazdi, dismissed the notion that legal and political aspects of the imāmate were the central issue in this departure. Creed and theology, argues

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[63] For example, 'Allāmah Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tabātabā'ī, *Shi'ite Islam*, trans. and ed. by Seyyed Hossein Nasr (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1975), 179. See also, Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'ite Islam*, 15.

[64] Imām Álī, *Nahj al-Balāqah*, 554.

Muhammad Taqi, is the main disagreement between Shī'ah and Sunni.[65] Concerning the importance of the imāmate, Muhammad Taqi writes:

> The Shi'i system of belief consists of a series of interconnected doctrines forming a coherent whole; the imāmate is one of these doctrines, and without it the order and integrity of the system is lost.[66]

Although the early Shī'ah believed in the imāmate since its conception, the doctrine of the imāmate itself had not been fully formulated for the first one hundred years of Shī'ah history. The uncertainty of the future of the community brought the early Shī'ah to the point of disappointment.[67] Finally, it was during the time of al-Bāqir and Ja'far al-Sādiq, the fifth and sixth imāms respectively, that the doctrine was fully formulated.[68]

The imāmate in Shī'ah is generally perceived to be confined to the twelve imāms. However, al-Bāqir asserted that there has been a continuity of imāmate even since the time of Adam.[69] Al-Bāqir declared,

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[65] Ayatollah Muhammad Taqi Misbah Yadi, "The Shi'ite Argument for the Necessity of an Inerrant Imam," in *Shi'ite Heritage: Essays on Classical and Modern Traditions*, ed. and trans. by L. Clarke (New York: Global Publications, 2001), 133.

[66] Ibid., 134.

[67] Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism*, 8.

[68] Said Amir Arjomand, *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam: Religion, Political Order and Societal Change in Shi'ite Iran from the Beginning to 1890* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 27.

[69] Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'ite Islam*, 145.

> By God! God has not left the earth, since the death of Adam, without there being on it an imām guiding (the people) to God. He is the Proof of God to His servants and the earth will not remain without the Proof of God to his servants.[70]

Concerning the authority of the imāms Arjomand explains, "the earliest Islamic usage of the term imām connotes divine authority whose end is the guidance of mankind. It was therefore drawn upon to designate authority in divine law, whether personal or impersonal."[71] It is obvious that the Shī'ah deliberately applied their concept of imām to the prophets and claimed that these prophets functioned as imāms during their lifetime.[72]

The doctrine of the imāmate in Shī'ah theology affirms that "God has bestowed upon the Holy Community the gift of an infallible guide at all times, a guide who is to govern all affairs in the temporal realms and, therefore, safeguard its welfare."[73] The scope of the imāmate's authority is not limited to the religious aspect of the community but also the philosophy, mysticism, politics, and historical progression.[74] Similar assertion is given by 'Allāmah Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tabātabā'ī when he

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[70] Quoted in *Bihār al-anwār*, Vol 23, Page 22, No. 25. See also al-Kulaynī, *Al-Kāfī*, I, 178. In his list, Momen includes Noah, Abraham, Moses, and even Jesus as the prophets and imāms. See also, idem, *An Introduction to Shi'ite Islam*, 148.

[71] Arjomand, *The Shadow of God*, 34.

[72] Al-Kulaynī explained the difference between imām, prophet, and messenger in this way: "A prophet is one who sees things (matters of Divine guidance) in his dreams and hears the voice but does not see the angel. The messenger is one who hears the voice, in his dreams sees things (of matters of Divine guidance) and sees the angel," while the imām "hears the voice but does not see and observe the angel." See al-Kulaynī, *Al-Kāfī,* I, 152.

[73] Karl-Heinrich Göbel, "Imāmate" in *Expectation of the Millennium: Shi'ism in History,* eds. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Hamid Dabashi, and Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr (New York: State University of New York Press, 1989), 2.

[74] Ibid.

categorized the study of the Shī'ah imāmate into three perspectives: 1) the perspective of the Islamic government; 2) the perspective of sciences and injunctions; and 3) the perspective of leadership and innovative guidance in the spiritual life.[75] Because of this, it is clear that the authority of an imām in Shī'ah is not limited to the religious realm, but politics and science as well. On the other hand, the doctrine of the High Priesthood of Christ in Christian theology is strictly limited to the His role as the intercessor in the spiritual life of Christians. This section, therefore, will discuss the most important Shī'ah doctrine of the imāmate that corresponds with the biblical teaching of the Priesthood of Christ, particularly the concept of the sinlessness of Jesus Christ.

The fifth imām, al-Bāqir, was the first imām to give more attention to the interpretation of the Qur'ān than his predecessors.[76] In doing so, al-Bāqir emphasized the authority of the household of the Prophet in interpreting the Qur'ān as the revelation from God. This claim is recorded in *al-Kāfī* when Ja'far asserted:

> Of the knowledge that we have received is the interpretation of the Holy Quran and its law, the knowledge of the changes of time and the happenings therein. When Allah wants good for a people, He makes them to understand. If He would address one who does not want to understand, such a person turns away as if he has heard nothing.[77]

This authority of interpreting the Qur'ān is only bestowed to the progeny of the Prophet who, according to Sachedina, "were endowed with the secret knowledge of the

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[75] Tabātabā'ī, *Shi'ite Islam*, 173.

[76] Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism*, 15.

[77] al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, I, 209.

revelation."[78] Therefore, the imāms in Shī'ah theology possess these two important attributes: sinlessness and infallibility.

There are two Arabic words that are important to help understand the concept of the sinlessness of the imāms: *ma'sum* and *'isma.* The word *ma'sum* itself means "sinless," while the *'isma* is a theological term in Islamic theology that means "the immunity from error and sin."[79] In Shī'ah theology, the concept of *'isma* signifies "the total knowledge of the meaning of the revelation and its prescriptions."[80]

Shī'ah exegetes would argue that the impeccability of the imām is grounded in the teaching of the Qur'ān, particularly Sūrah 3:112 and Sūrah 4:59.[81] In regards to the latter Sūrah, Jafri comments:

> The Imāms are the proofs (*Hujja*) of God on earth, their words are the words of God, and their commands are the commands of God. Obedience to them is obedience to God, and disobedience to them is disobedience to God. In all their decisions they are inspired by God, and they are in absolute authority. It is to them, therefore, that 'God has ordained obedience.'[82]

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[78] Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism*, 15.

[79] Wilfred Madelung, "'ISMA," *EI2*, 182–84.

[80] E. Tyan, "'isma," *EI2*, 184.

[81] Sūrah 4:59 says, "O ye who believe! Obey Allah, and obey the Messenger, and those charged with authority among you. If ye differ in anything among yourselves, refer it to Allah and His Messenger, if ye do believe in Allah and the Last Day: That is best, and most suitable for final determination."

[82] Jafri, *Origins and Early Development*, 294.

Jafri's description on the distinctiveness of Shī'ah imāms actually equates them to God. He continues to build his arguments on the sinlessness of the imāms by referring to Ja'far's comment on Sūrah 33:33[83] where the sixth imām recordedly declared:

> The Imām of the time is the witness for the people and he is the gate to God (*Bāb Allāh*) and the road (*Sabīl*) to Him, and the guide thereto (*Dalil*), and the repository of His knowledge, and the interpreter of His revelations. The Imām of his time is a pillar of God's unity (*tawhid*). The Imām is immune from sin (*khata*) and error (*dalal*). The Imāms are those from whom "God has removed all impurity and made them absolutely pure."[84]

Furthermore, Sobhani argues that the inerrancy of Shī'ah imāms is equal to that of the Qur'ān, which means that "just as the Qur'ān is immune against all types of error, so are the imāms immune from all mental and volitional sin."[85] Thus, there is almost no distinction between the Qur'ān and the imāms since the imāms functioned as the "speaking (*al-natiq*) Qur'ān."[86] Since imām is the guardian of the law, the imām must be impeccable to preserve the law from addition or loss. The imām must be impeccable because he cannot be unjust.[87]

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[83] Sūrah 33:33 declares, "And stay quietly in your houses, and make not a dazzling display, like that of the former Times of Ignorance; and establish regular Prayer, and give regular Charity; and obey Allah and His Messenger. And Allah only wishes to remove all abomination from you, ye members of the Family, and to make you pure and spotless." Here Yusuf Ali prefers to translate the word rij's as "abomination" while Sahih International translation uses the word "impurity."

[84] Jafri, *Origins and Early Development*, 294.

[85] Ibid., 12. The problem with Sobhani's exposition on *ma'sum* is that this doctrine could be applied to any other person and not exclusively belong to the imāms or prophets. Sobhani refers to Mary as an example of a regular person who was protected from sin and error. Ibid., 111. Sobhani also argue that the word "impurity" or "abomination" (*rij's*) in Sūrah 33:33 refers to "all forms of mental, moral, and spiritual impurity, for sin flows forth as a result of these impurities." Ibid.

[86] Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism*, 15.

[87] Diana Steigerwald, "Twelver Shī'ī Ta'wīl," in *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur'ān*, ed. Andrew Rippin (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2009), 383.

Another explanation for the Shī'ah doctrine of sinlessness comes from one of the most respected Shī'ah scholars, Shyakh al-Mufīd, in *The Emendation of a Shi'ite Creed.* Al-Mufīd wrote:

> The impeccability granted by Allah to His Proofs is the succor and grace by which the Proofs keep themselves free from sin and error in the religion of Allāh, the Exalted. The impeccability, in fact, is a grace granted by Allāh, the Exalted, to him whom He knows will hold fast by it.[88]

Furthermore, in his other work, *Kitāb al-Irshād,* al-Mufīd explained that there is a need for someone who is infallible and perfect to uphold the law and "punish the criminals," "correct the disobedient," "teach the ignorant," "defend the land of Islam" and other responsibilities.[89] Therefore, someone who is protected from sin is required and essential to the Shī'ah. Some Shī'ah even believe that the impeccability of their imāms is greater than those of the prophets.[90]

The early Shī'ah theologians understood that the doctrine of *'isma* is theoretically ideal but admitted that there are unavoidable problems when applied in practice. While the decisions of all imāms is supposedly infallible, there were times when Shī'ah theologians had to come up with explanations for their followers. This

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[88] Abu Abdillah Muhammad ibn Numan Shaykh Al-Mufid, *Tashihul I'tiqad: The Emendation of a Shi'ite Creed*, trans. by Irfan Abdul Hamid (Tehran, Iran: World Organization for Islamic Services, 2007), 83–4. His full name is Abu'Abdillah Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn an-Nu'man al-Harithi al-'Ukbari al-Baghdadi. He was born in the district of 'Ukbara in AD 947 and died in AD 1022. The title al-Mufīd was given to him by his master, 'Ali ibn 'Isa ar-Rummani, because of his intellectual knowledge. Al-Mufīd was a contemporary of a well-known Ash'ari theologian, Abū Bakr al-Bāqillāni, whom al-Mufīd frequently debated. Among his students is Nāsir al-Dīn al-Tūsī. See Joel L. Kraemer, *Humanism in the Renaissance of Islam: The Cultural Revival During the Buyid Age* (New York: Brill, 1992), 67–8.

[89] Shyakh al-Mufīd, *Kitāb al-Irshād,* 525–26. See also, Sobhani, *Doctrines of Shi'i Islam*, 111.

[90] Mehdi Mohaghegh, "Al-Sharīf Al-Murtadā and the Defense of the Imāmate," in *Shi'ite Heritage: Essays on Classical and Modern Traditions*, ed. and trans. by L. Clarke (New York: Global Publications, 2001), 128.

development, for example, happened when the sixth imām, Ja'far, made a controversial decision by choosing his younger son, Abu'l-Hasan Mūsā ibn Ja'far, to be his successor as opposed to the late Ismā'īl.[91] In explaining the decision that led to the emergence of Ismā'īli, the new Shī'ah sect, the Imāmate theologians came up with the doctrine of *badā'*, which literally means "appearance," or "emergence."[92] Sachedina describes *badā'* as "the intervention of new circumstances which had caused God to alter His early determination."[93]

While almost all Shī'ah claims of the sinlessness of the Mahdi derive from their *hadīth*, Christians' claim of the sinlessness of Jesus is completely grounded in NT teaching. Jesus' self-awareness of His sinless life was uttered during His conversation with the Jews in which the latter were challenged if any of them could convict Jesus of sin (John 8:46). As Frédéric Louis Godet wrote,

> The *perfect* holiness of Christ is in this passage demonstrated, not by the silence of the Jews, who might have ignored the sins of their questioner, but by the assurance with which His direct consciousness of the purity of His whole life is in this question affirmed.[94]

The book of Hebrews provides numerous references to the teachings of the high priesthood and the sinlessness of Jesus. The fact that these two topics were always discussed concomitantly shows that one cannot separate Christ's role as High Priest and

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[91] A brief description of this controversial decision has been discussed in chapter 2. See also, Cyril Glassé, "Seveners," in *The Concise Encyclopedia of Islam* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989), 354–56.

[92] I. Goldziher, "Badā'," in *EI2*.

[93] Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism*, 153.

[94] Frédéric Louis Godet, *Commentary on the Gospel of John: With a Critical Introduction.* trans. by M. D. Cusin (Edinburgh, Scotland, T. & T. Clark, 1887), 350 [Emphasis is original].

His sinless nature. It begins in Hebrews 4 when the author of the book affirms the sinlessness of Jesus despite being tempted (Heb 4:15). Paul Ellingworth argues that the author of Hebrews intentionally uses the word χωρίς, which implies "separation" from sin.[95] Heb 4:15, according to Ellingworth, means that "Jesus, though tempted, remained untouched by sin."[96] Moreover, when comparing the high priesthoods of Jesus and Melchizedek, the author of Hebrews uses five characteristics in 7:26 to emphasize the sinlessness of Christ.[97] These five characteristcs, ὅσιος, ἄκακος, ἀμίαντος, κεχωρισμένος ἀπὸ τῶν ἁμαρτωλῶν, ανδ ὑψηλότερος τῶν οὐρανῶν, are more than sufficient to describe Christ's pure and holy life as God incarnate, and His distinctiveness compared to other humans.[98] The affirmation of Christ' sinlessness also can be found in 1 Peter 1:19 when the apostle writes:

> And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with

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[95] Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 269. Ellingworth also argues that χωρίς is stronger than its synonyms, ἄνευ, ἐκτός, and ἄτερ.

[96] Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 269.

[97] "For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens" (Heb 7:26).

[98] Louw and Nida explain ὅσιος as "pertaining to being holy in the sense ofrior [*sic*] moral qualities and possessing certain essentially divine qualities in contrast with what is human." See Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 744. ἄκακος, according Ellingworth, is "a general term indicating absence of guilt or guile." See Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews,* 393–94. The term ἀμίαντος indicates someone who is pure in a religious and moral sense. See William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 54. Louw and Nida argue that "κεχωρισμένος ἀπὸ τῶν ἁμαρτωλῶν" implies the "exultation of Christ to the heavenly world." See Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament,* 615. The phrase "ὑψηλότερος τῶν οὐρανῶν" indicates that "Jesus occupies the highest position imaginable." See Simon J. Kistemaker and William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, in vol. 15 of *New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2001), 207.

> perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.

Peter continues his declaration about the sinlessness of Christ when he writes, "He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth" (1 Pet 2:22). The apostle, after witnessing the life, ministry, and suffering of Jesus, had the conviction that is clearly rooted in his understanding of Isaiah 53:9. Christians' conviction of the sinlessness of Christ is central to His work as the High Priest, as Patterson rightly contends:

> This condition of sinlessness is essential to his mediatorial work as priest on behalf of the human family. Having no sin of his own for which to atone, he was the Lamb of God, the sacrifice with neither sport nor blemish, the one able to make atonement for the sons of others.[99]

The discussion provided above can serve as a base for the discussions on the differences between the imāmate doctrine of Shī'ah and the role of Jesus Christ as the High Priest. The first difference is the political aspect of the Shī'ah Imāms, which cannot be found in the NT teaching of High Priesthood of Jesus. The Gospel of John clearly explains Christ's avoidance of assuming the kingship of the Jews following the feeding of the five thousand (John 6:15). Prior to His ascension to heaven, Jesus dismissed the disciples' question about the timing for Him to restore the kingdom to Israel by becoming their earthly king (Acts 1:6–8). Jesus' answer to the disciples was a clear NT teaching that His role as the Messiah should not be perceived as an earthly political messiah as in the time of David.

All Shī'ah writers affirm that the imāms are the supreme leaders of the community, not only in religious practices but also in politics. The impact of this view is

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[99] Patterson, "The Work of Christ," in *A Theology for the Church*, 350.

the rejection from the non-Shī'ah towards the imāms. Even within the Shī'ah states centuries later, as explained by Momen, there were kings or other political leaders who "arrogated to himself some of the functions of the Hidden Imām."[100]

The second difference is the acceptance of their roles among the adherents of their Holy Scriptures. The role of Christ as High Priest is unanimously accepted by those who believe the Bible as their Holy Scripture. In this case, not only evangelical Christians, but also Catholics. Gerald O'Collins, a Catholic theologian, asserts:

> The efficacy of his sacrifice, his mediation of the new covenant, the perfect consistency between his human life and cultic activity, his divine identity, and his direct appointment by God made Jesus' priesthood quite superior to the Levitical priesthood (Heb 6:20–10:18).[101]

On the other hand, it can be argued that the Shī'ah doctrine of the imāmate itself is in contradiction with the teaching of the Qur'ān. This is the reason the Sunni continually deny the doctrine of the imāmate as a true teaching of Islam.[102] Although there is a difference between biblical teaching of the creation and the Qur'ānic version of the creation of man, the Qur'ān has never mentioned anything related to the special creation of the imāms prior to creation of the world. The creation account in the Qur'ān, amid the lack of continuing thought in its presentation, covers the creation of heaven and earth in six days, Adam and Eve, angels, and *jin*. Nowhere in the Qur'ān can be found such an

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[100] Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'ite Islam*, 170.

[101] Gerald O'Collins, *Christology: A Biblical, Historical, and Systematic Study of Jesus,* 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 30.

[102] An example of this rejection is written by Riffat Hassan, who vehemently criticizes the doctrine of the imāmate of Shī'ah and denies that the Qur'ān teaches a doctrine of intercession between God and humanity. While refuting the claim of the infallibility of the imāms, Hassan argues that there was a dispute over the seventh imām as the example. See Hasan, "Messianism and Islam," 276–77. For a debate between Shī'ah and the Sunni pertaining to the doctrine of the imāmate, see Mohaghegh, "Al-Sharīf Al-Murtadā and the Defense of the Imāmate," in *Shi'ite Heritage*, 123–31.

important doctrine as the imāmate's existence before the world is created. While Muslims in general will argue that there are *ahadīth* given to explain Shī'ah teachings (that are not revealed in the Qur'ān), such an important doctrine of the creation of imāms should be included if deemed important by Allāh.

The *Ghaybah* of the Mahdi and the Ascension of Jesus

The occultation of the Mahdi and the Ascension of Christ are two events that are also worthy of comparison. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the Shī'ah believe that the Mahdi is currently in a state of occultation, more specifically in the Greater Occultation, waiting for the command from God to return to earth to accomplish his mission. Christ, according to Acts 1, has ascended to heaven "and will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11).

There are several reasons why this dissertation compares the occultation of the Mahdi to the ascension of Jesus Christ. First, the early believers of these two religions lived under the oppression of tyrannical rulers. Shī'ah history shows that all twelve imāms were persecuted by the Ummayads and later on by the Abbāsids. In fact, some Shī'ah theology emerged and developed in response to these persecutions.[103]

The history of Christianity is also filled with persecutions. Christ and the early Christians lived under severe cruelty from the Roman Empire and the Judean leaders. The

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[103] Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism*, 99. Another example of Shī'ah doctrine which emerged as the result of the oppression is *taqiyya*, or religious dissimulation. Using Sūrah 16:106 as the basis for this doctrine, the Shī'ah developed a doctrine that would allow the community to lawfully tell a lie to protect their safety. See Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'ite Islam*, 39, 183. Sūrah 16:106 declares, "Anyone who, after accepting faith in Allah, utters Unbelief,- except under compulsion, his heart remaining firm in Faith - but such as open their breast to Unbelief, on them is Wrath from Allah, and theirs will be a dreadful Penalty."

birth narrative in Matthew describes how Joseph and Mary took baby Jesus to Egypt out of fear that Herod would kill Jesus. The crucifixion of Christ and the trials experienced by the early disciples mentioned in the book of Acts show that the early Christians lived under heavy persecution.

The second reason has to do with the expectation for the Mahdi to return after the Occultation and the *parousia* of Christ. Since the beginning of their history, Christians and Shī'ah have been eagerly waiting for their messiahs to come. The expectation of the *parousia* of Jesus Christ, as presented in the previous chapter, expressed in the early Christian prayer, *Maranatha*, "O Lord, come!" (1 Cor 16:22). Similarly, the Shī'ah anticipation of the *zuhūr* is also expressed in their rituals and writings which says, "May Allah hasten his coming." This Shī'ah exclamation is derived from the letter sent by the Shī'ah in Kufa to Imām Husayn that states:

> Be quick and hurry up, for the people are waiting for you, and they do not look towards anyone other than you. Hurry up. Hurry up. We repeat: Make haste. Make haste. And peace be upon you.[104]

The third and final reason for this comparison is the fact that Shī'ah theology and Christian theology were formulated during the time of the expected return of their messiahs. There are three significant *hadīth* that were compiled during the early period of Occultation. The first one is *Al-Kāfī* by Muhammad ibn Ya'qub al-Kulaynī which was written during the period of Minor Occultation.[105] Arjomand asserts that *Al-Kāfī* is "the

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[104] Ibrahim Ayati, *A Probe into the History of Ashura* (Middletown, DE: Feedbooks, 2017), 49.

[105] Amir-Moezzi, *Early Shi'ism,* 101.

most important product of the era of perplexity . . . ."[106] Much of the early Shī'ah theology developed during the Greater Occultation.[107]

Amid the similarities, there are significant differences between Christianity and Shī'ah regarding the absence of their messiahs. The following discussion will examine the comparisons between the two events. First, Shī'ah writers admit that the occultation of their last imām brings uncertainty in the life of his followers. Sachedina, for example, refers to the period of Greater Occultation as "the period of hardship" for the Shī'ah due to the uncertainty of the Mahdi's return.[108] Since the death of Àlī, the first imām, until the occultation of the Mahdi, the Shī'ah community had always had leaders among them. As Steigerwald asserts that, "Following the occultation of the Twelfth Imām, everything changed. The Twelver Shī'ī community no longer had access to the direct guidance of their imām . . . "[109] This situation actually should not surprise anyone who studies this topic since Shī'ah writers themselves admit that the reason for the Twelfth Imām's *ghaybah* was out of fear of being killed by the enemy.[110]

A completely different situation occurred in the life of the early Christians following the ascension of Jesus. The fear and uncertainty after the resurrection of Jesus

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[106] Arjomand, "The Consolation of Theology," 551.

[107] Sachedina provides two reasons of why Shī'ah theology, particularly the apocalyptic ones, formulated during the occultation of the Twelfth Imām. The first reason is to comfort the Shī'ah community "with hopes of a final restoration of the Islamic rule." The second reason serves as the justification for the delay of the return of the Mahdi. See, Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism*, 151–52.

[108] Ibid., 100.

[109] Steigerwald, "Twelver Shī'ī Ta'wīl," 381.

[110] Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering*, 221. See also, Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'ite Islam,* 165.

had been replaced by courage and boldness because of the assurance of Christ's ascension to heaven and the promise of His return. Ergun Caner is right when he says, "Islamic eschatology is interesting but it is missing one component that a premillennial hope offers, namely, assurance."[111] The book of Acts recounts the courage and boldness of the disciples of Jesus Christ following the day of Pentecost. These disciples, who were hiding from the Jews and the Roman authority just days before, lived in hope of the resurrection and the return of Jesus Christ.

The second comparison, between the time after Christ's ascension and the *ghaybah* of the Mahdi, is concerning the whereabouts of Christ and the Mahdi. Acts 1:9–11 clearly teaches that the ascension of Christ to heaven was confirmed by angels and witnessed by the disciples. In his letter to the church at Ephesus, Paul testifies that God raised Jesus from the dead and "seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places" (Eph 1:20). The writer of the book of Hebrews also confirms the ascension of Christ when he writes, "Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood *He entered the Most Holy Place* once for all, having obtained eternal redemption" (Heb 9:12 – italic is mine). The conviction of the early church concerning the fact that Jesus is in heaven is also expressed in the Apostle's Creed: "on the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead." This evidence demonstrates that Christians have never experienced any doubt about Jesus sitting on His heavenly throne waiting for the appointed time of His *parousia.*

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[111] Ergun Caner, "The Patience of Hope," in *The Return of Christ: A Premillennial Perspective*, eds. David L. Allen & Steve W. Lemke (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2011), 43.

The Shī'ah doctrine of *ghaybah*, on the other hand, is ambiguous in its presentation of the existence of the Mahdi during the occultation. The Mahdi, according to the Shī'ah, is living and alive during the Greater Occultation. However, Shī'ah traditionists and theologians are inconsistent when describing the existence of the Mahdi. For example, when challenged by some people on the existence of the Mahdi, his first deputy asserted that, "the *Sāhib al-Amr* [Lord of Command] is present during the *hajj* [pilgrimage to Mecca] every year, and he sees the people and knows them although they fail to see him or know him."[112] A similar argument comes from a well-known Iraqi Shī'ah cleric, Ayatullah Muhammad Baqir as-Sadr, when he wrote about the existence of the Mahdi during His occultation:

> Thus, al-Mahdi (peace be upon him) is no longer an idea waiting to be materialized nor a prophecy that needs to be substantiated, but a living reality and a particular person, living among us in flesh and blood, who is sharing our hopes, suffering, sorrows and joys, actually witnessing all the sufferings, sadness and transgression that exist on the surface of the earth, who is affected with all this from near or far, who is waiting for the appropriate moment when he can stretch his hands to every oppressed and needy person and eradicate the tyrants.[113]

However, Sadr's explanation is in contradiction with that of al-Majlisī, who declares that if Jesus "is in heavens without anyone serving him food and drinks and he is a man like the Mahdi (a.s). If he can stay like that in the heavens likewise the Mahdi (a.s) can in the

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[112] Arjomand, *The Shadow of God*, 41. For stories of the Mahdi's unrecognized appearance in Mecca see al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, I, 323.

[113] Ayatullah Muhammad Baqir as-Sadr, *An Inquiry Concerning Al-Mehdi (ATF)*[on-line]; accessed on January 18, 2018; available from https://www.al-islam.org/printpdf/book/export/html/11293; Internet.

cellar."[114] Here al-Majlisī is referring to the last place the Mahdi was seen before he went into occultation.

The *Qiyām* of the Mahdi and the Parousia of Christ

While the return of Christ in NT teaching is derived from the Greek word *parousia*, there are three Arabic terms used to describe the return of the Mahdi in Shī'ah eschatology; these three words are *qiyām*, *zuhūr*, and *raj'a*.[115] The definition of the first word *qiyām* means "arise," or "resurrection."[116] It contributes two important aspects to Shī'ah theology: the title of the Mahdi, and the event of his return or coming. One of the titles of the Mahdi is *al-Qā'im*, which means "the one who will arise;"[117] it is probably the most frequently used term in Shī'ah *hadīth*.[118] The reason why the Mahdi is called *al-Qā'im,* according to *Kitāb al-Ghaibah*, is because "he will rise after his name dies. He will establish a mighty enterprise."[119] Thus, the return of *al-Qā'im* is referred to as *qiyām*

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[114] Al-Majlisī, *Kitāb al-Ghaibah,* 172.

[115] Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism*, 150–51. See also Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'ite Islam*, 166–67.

[116] This word is also where the word *qiyāma* is derived from. The phrase *yawm al-qiyāma* in Islamic eschatology in general refers to "the day of resurrection." See Etan Kohlberg, "Kiyāma," in *EI2*.

[117] Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'ite Islam*, 45.

[118] For example, in *Kitāb al-Irshād*, the writer mostly refers to the Mahdi as *al-Qā'im* throughout his exposition of the Mahdi. See Shaykh al-Mufīd, *Kitāb al-Irshād*, 524–54.

[119] Al-Majlisī, *Kitāb al-Ghaibah,* 62. Therefore, al-Majlisī also defines the meaning of *al-Qā'im* is "the Establisher," or sometimes "the Establisher of the Truth (*al-Qā'im bil Haqq*)." Ibid., 58–60.

since the Mahdi will arise from his occultation to "fill the world with justice and equity."[120]

The second word, *zuhūr* literally means "appearance," or "emergence." The main purpose of *zuhūr* is "to humble or destroy the evil forces of this world and establish the fully just Islamic rule."[121] However, it is not known why this term is not given much attention in the writings of Shī'ah scholars.[122] Sachedina defines *raj'a* as "the return to the present state of existence after death, before the Day of Resurrection."[123] Although the term *raj'a* is also used to describe the return of the Mahdi from concealment, Momen contends that this term only applies to "the return to life of figures who have died such as the Imām Husayn."[124] Compared to other terms, *raj'a* is the doctrine that suffers frequent attack from non-Shī'ah who claim that this concept is borrowed from Judaism.[125]

In order to prove that these concepts are grounded in the teaching of the Qur'ān, Shī'ah exegetes reference several qur'ānic verses. One of the verses that is used to justify the emergence of the *al-Qā'im* after his occultation is Sūrah 70:26, which says, "And those who hold to the truth of the Day of Judgment." This verse, according to al-

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[120] Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism*, 150. See also, Jassim M. Hussain, "Messianism and the Mahdi," in *Expectation of the Millennium: Shi'ism in History*, 13.

[121] Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism*, 173.

[122] Arjomand, for example, does not include *zuhūr* in his discussion of these terms. See Arjomand, *The Shadow of God*, 39–41. See also Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, 189–229.

[123] Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism*, 166.

[124] Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'ite Islam*, 166. Since the Mahdi did not die and is still alive, Momen argues that the proper term is *zuhūr* and *qiyām.*

[125] Etan Kohlberg, "*radj'a,*" in *EI2*. The early Shī'ah, further explained by Kohlberg, also applied this doctrine to Àlī believing that he will be brought to life before the resurrection.

Kulaynī, as cited by Jassim Hussain, speaks of those who believe in the reappearance of *al-Qā'im*.[126] Another verse is Sūrah 2:8–9, which says:

> Of the people there are some who say: "We believe in Allah and the Last Day;" but they do not (really) believe. Fain would they deceive Allah and those who believe, but they only deceive themselves, and realise [*sic*] (it) not!"

Mansur al-Yaman, a Shī'ah writer from 10th century, argued that the Last Day mentioned in this verse refers to *al-Qā'im al-Mahdi*.[127] There are numerous other verses listed in Hussain's section of *al-Qā'im* but all of them are Shī'ah eisegesis of the Mahdi, and not the literal interpretation of the text.

The first and foremost difference between the *qiyām* of the Mahdi and the *parousia* of Christ is the awareness that these figures had concerning their returns. As explained in Chapter 3, Jesus Christ prophesied His return to the disciples prior to the crucifixion. The Olivet Discourse clearly demonstrates the self-awareness of Christ that He will be the One who comes as the Messiah. This was later echoed by the angels who were with the disciples witnessing His ascension to heaven (Acts 1). All of the NT writings pertaining to the return of Christ are very explicit in their presentations and thus, no eisegetical method of interpretation is needed to prove the *parousia* of Christ.

On the other hand, one will have difficulty finding qur'ānic verses that clearly prophesy the return of the Mahdi without having to depend on the interpretation of Shī'ah traditions. The absence of an explicit reference to the Mahdi, in verses such as Sūrah 70:26 and 2:8–9 given above, prove that the *qiyām* of the Mahdi is not grounded in qur'ānic teaching.

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[126] Hussain, "Messianism and the Mahdi," 13.

[127] Ibid.

The second distinction in this issue concerns the length of their reigns on earth. Premillennial theologians unanimously agree and are very clear in defining the length of Christ's reign on earth: one thousand years. Their literal interpretation of Revelation 20, as explained in the previous chapter, shows that there will be a definite length of time of His rule on earth. There are no contradictions in the NT concerning the length of Christ's reign on earth than what has been described in the book of Revelation.

Shī'ah theologians, on the other hand, have presented different opinions when it comes to the length of the Mahdi's rule on earth. Sachedina admits that "there is no consensus on the Imāmite sources on the duration of the Mahdi's rule."[128] Al-Majlisī asserted that the Mahdi will be among the community for seven years or nine years.[129] Another *hadīth* by al-Baqīr reportedly mentioned the reign of the Mahdi's rule will be for three hundred and nine years,[130] while Momen only avers that the Mahdi will rule "for a number of years."[131] There is also another *hadīth* by Ja'far al-Sādiq that provides a different number of years of the Mahdi's rule. Al-Sādiq allegedly asserted, "Seven years . . . . but the days will lengthen for him so that one of his years will be the same length as ten of your years. So the years of his dominion will be seventy of your years here."[132] All of these numbers indicate that the doctrine of the Mahdi, and in this case, the alleged

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[128] Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism*, 176.

[129] Al-Majlisī, *Kitāb al-Ghaibah*, 152.

[130] Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism*, 176.

[131] Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam*, 168.

[132] Shaykh al-Mufīd, *Kitāb al-Irshād*, 550.

length of his reign, is not rooted in one primary source of divine inspiration as claimed by the Shī'ah. A true, divinely inspired writing should not confuse its readers on important teachings such as this one.

The nature of the reign of the Mahdi is also interesting to evaluate since it has a resemblance to the millennial reign of Christ. Ayoub argues that there will be peace like "the peaceable kingdom envisioned by the ancient prophet of Israel," and makes a reference to Isaiah 11.[133] Ayoub further contends that this era of "absolute peace, prosperity and blessing" during the reign of the Mahdi will be beyond what the prophet of Isaiah saw in his vision, but "resembling more closely perhaps the new earth envisioned by the venerable seer of Patmos, St. John the Divine."[134] The prosperity and blessings in the Mahdi era are explained by al-Majlisī:

> During this period, my Ummah will rejoice a leisure the like of which they have never seen. The earth will give it blessings and will not forbid anything from them. Wealth on that day will be like grains. Men would rise and ask, 'O' Mahdi, give me something.' He would say, 'Take.'[135]

These traditions are but a continuation of the long history of the apocalyptic vision of humanity. They remind Christians of the apocalyptic warnings of Christ that, before his second coming, many false messiahs will appear.[136]

The signs of the *qiyām* of the Mahdi and the parousia of Christ is the third comparison worth examination. As explained in Matthew 24, concerning the return of

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[133] Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering*, 227.

[134] Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering*, 227. One would find that obviously Ayoub does not understand that the two passages, Isaiah 11 and Rev 21, in premillennial theology actually talk about the same era of millennial kingdom during the reign of Christ on earth.

[135] Al-Majlisī, *Kitāb al-Ghaibah*, 152, 164.

[136] Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering*, 223.

Christ, the Shī'ah hadīth also describes the signs that precede the *qiyām* of the Mahdi.[137] Al-Tusi in his *hadīth*, for example, explains several signs to prepare the return of the Mahdi:

> Ten things are inevitable before Judgment Day: Sufyani,[138] Dajjal, Smoke, Daabba, advent of the Qā'im, rising of the sun from the west, splitting of the earth in the east, descent of Isa (a.s), splitting of the earth in the Arabian Gulf, rising of a fire from the sea of Adn, which will herd the people towards the field of gathering (*Mahshar*).[139]

These ten things listed by al-Tusi are just a small number of signs compared to numerous others as described by al-Mufīd.[140] One of them is similar to Matthew 24:5. Concerning the coming of false messiahs, al-Mufīd declared, " . . . sixty liars will come forward, all of them claiming prophethood, and twelve will come forward from the family of Abū Tālib, all of them claiming the imāmate."[141] It is interesting that Shī'ah eschatology emphasizes the false Christ (*Al-masīh ad-dajjāl*), false prophets, and false imāms, but nothing whatsoever on the false Mahdi. The *dajjāl* is seen as the number one enemy and the task to defeat him is given to Jesus, and not to the Mahdi.

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[137] Obviously, Sunni and Shī'ah once again differ in predicting the signs of the *qiyāma* although some of them are identical. For the list of signs that both Sunni and Shī'ah agreed upon, see Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam*, 168–70. See also David Cook, *Contemporary Muslim Apocalyptic Literature* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2005), 126–30.

[138] Sufyani was an actual historical figure who also become the enemy of the Mahdi in Shī'ah apocalyptic. For an exhaustive description of Sufyani, see David Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, 122–36. According to Ayoub, al-Sufyānī Ùthmān ibn Àndasah is the descendant of Shī'ah worst enemy, Yazīd. See Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering*, 222.

[139] Abu-Ja'far Muhammad ibn al-Hasan ibn al-Hasan al-Tusi, *Book of Occultation* (Iran: Ansariyan Publications, 2011), 15542–15555, Kindle. One need to understand that the list provided by this *hadīth* is not in order of its appearance. If Jesus (Isa) comes before the Mahdi, then it is impossible that the descent of Isa happens following the rise of the *Qā'im*.

[140] See Shaykh al-Mufīd, *Kitāb al-Irshād*, 541–42.

[141] Ibid. See also al-Tusi, *Book of Occultation*, 15542–15555.

The Supremacy of Jesus Christ over the Mahdi

Shī'ah theology depicts the Mahdi as the one who will return from occultation and fill the world with peace and justice. His community has been anticipating the *qiyām* of their messiah— which is believed to be a powerful and majestic one— for more than one thousand years. Although the length of his reign is unknown, the Mahdi will rule the world and eventually die.[142] In spite of numerous references to Jesus and the events of His life, the Shī'ah minimizes the role of Jesus in their eschatology.[143] Jesus, in Shī'ah eschatology, will come first to defeat the *dajjāl* and later on submit his authority to the Mahdi by refusing to lead the Muslim community in prayer.[144] This section will examine whether the Shī'ah's claim of the Mahdi's superiority over Jesus in his *qiyām* can be supported by both Scriptures.

A careful examination of the Mahdi's return and his reign on earth will show that the Twelfth Imām will not rule the earth unaided. Numerous figures play significant roles in supporting the Mahdi in accomplishing his task, the first one being Jesus. The important assignment to defeat the *dajjāl* is given to Jesus, and not to other imāmate figures. Following Jesus' successful mission to subdue the *dajjāl*, the Mahdi will come and take leadership from the Jesus. Nonetheless, it is essential to remember that the doctrine of *raj'a* explains that not only will the Twelfth Imām arise from the dead, but

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[142] Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering,* 229.

[143] David Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, 198–99.

[144] Al-Majlisī, *Kitāb al-Ghaibah*, 152.

also Àlī and Husayn.[145] The Shī'ah anticipate the return of Husayn to "avenge himself on those who killed him."[146] It is also reported that Prophet Muhammad, accompanied by the *Ansār* and the *Muhājirūn*, will return.[147] All of them, along with the Mahdi, will lead their community in purifying the teaching of Muhammad, which is Shī'ah.

The description provided above is inconsistent with the qur'ānic teaching of the *qiyāma,* especially Sūrah 43:61.[148] Despite the argument on whether the word "*innahū"* refers to Jesus or the Mahdi, the word "*hū*" is a third person singular pronoun in the Arabic language. Thus, it negates any possibility of other individuals as the sign for the Hour.

Another theological issue worth discussing here is that the supremacy of the Mahdi in the *qiyāma* actually minimizes the ultimate authority of the Islamic God in this important part of his creation. As Jane Smith and Yvonne Haddad assert, "In the Islamic conception, God as the Creator and Originator of all things has not only ultimate but also

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[145] Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering*, 224–25.

[146] Ibid. When Imām al-Baqīr asked about the duration of the the Mahdi's rule, he replied: "'Nineteen years. After that *Muntasir* [Imām Husain (a.s)] will return (do Rajat) and he will eliminate the enemies of Imam Husain (a.s) in revenge till *Saffah* [*Amirul Momineen* (a.s)] will do *Rajat.*' Praise be to Allah, the Mighty and the High, the book has reached completion. Benedictions and salutations of Almighty Allah be on Muhammad and his chosen Progeny; the ones, from whom Almighty Allah has kept away all impurities and has purified them as it deserves." See al-Tusi, *Book of Occultation*, 16582–16588.

[147] Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism*, 166. See also Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering*, 225.

[148] "And (Jesus) shall be a Sign (for the coming of) the Hour (of Judgment): therefore have no doubt about the (Hour), but follow ye Me: this is a Straight Way."

sole authority over the beginning, duration, and final dispensation of all things."[149]

Using Sūrah 2:117[150] as their argument, Smith and Haddad further state:

> Basic to Islamic theological discussions of the nature of humankind, the structure and order of the universe, and the course of human history as part of the eschatological story of Islam is the primary consideration of whether or not specific formulations are consonant with the Qur'ānic understanding of the essential oneness of the divine.[151]

The return of Jesus as described in Revelation 19 will be a magnificent event and all the earth will tremble at His coming. Chapter 3 has sufficiently described the majestic, glorious, visible, and triumphant *parousia* of Christ. The same situation, however, cannot be found in the alleged return of the Mahdi. Although there will be signs preceding the Mahdi's return, Shī'ah tradition points out that people will not be aware of his presence. For example, according to Sachedina, the Mahdi "will enter the Ka'ba, without anyone recognizing him."[152] The Mahdi will then stand between two places, *Rukn* and *Maqām*, and with a loud and clear voice he will announce his presence by

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[149] Jane Smith and Yvonne Haddad, *The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 2.

[150] "To Him is due the primal origin of the heavens and the earth: When He decreeth [*sic*] a matter, He saith to it: 'Be,' and it is."

[151] Smith and Haddad, *The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection*, 2.

[152] Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism*, 161. The fact that the Mahdi is unrecognizable itself is another evidence of the inconsistency of Shī'ah traditions. Numerous *ahadīth* detail the physical description of the Mahdi from his age, hair style, and clothes. Al-Mufīd wrote that the Mahdi ". . . . is a young man of medium stature with a handsome face and beautiful hair. His hair flows on to his shoulders. A light rises on his face. The hair of his beard and head is black." See al-Mufīd, *Kitāb Al-Irshād*, 550–51. Al-Majlisī described the Mahdi's color "is an Arabic color and his physique is an Israeli physique. On his right cheek there is a mole, seems like a star glittering." This *hadīth* also depicted the Mahdi as ". . . . a man of forty years and with a face like a glittering star . . . . He will be wearing two light white cloaks from al-Qatwān, seeming as he were from the men of the children of Israel." See al-Majlisī, *Kitāb al-Ghaibah*, 162–64. Not only that there are details on the physicality of the Mahdi, Shī'ah traditions also predict the day of the return of the Mahdi. Al-Mufīd wrote that the Mahdi will rise "on the night of the twenty-third of the month and he will rise on the day of *Āshūrā*, the day on which al-Husayn was killed." See al-Mufīd, *Kitāb Al-Irshād*, 548.

saying, "Of the chiefs and the people who are close to me! O you who were preserved on earth by God in order to help me when I emerge! Come toward me to obey me!"[153] Al-Majlisī, however, narrated two *ahadīth* that show the need for introducing the Mahdi to his people due to the fact that he will not be recognized. The first one explains that, "The Mahdi will rise and there will be a cloud over his head," and the other declares that, "The Mahdi will rise while an angel over his head calling, *This is the Mahdi! Follow him!*"[154] In the case of Christ's return, the announcement made by trumpeting angels in heaven as recorded in Revelation 19:1–2 is a celebratory declaration of His coming. The purpose of the angels heralding Christ's return is not to introduce Christ, because such an introduction is unnecessary due to His glorious and powerful descent from heaven, but a proclamation. It is clear from the explanation above that the Mahdi, despite the Shī'ah's claim of his superiority, will not demonstrate his power and authority as the one anointed with guidance from God. Christ's supremacy and preeminence are obviously depicted in the NT identifying Him as the King of kings and Lord of lords (Rev 19:16).

This chapter has provided a comparison of several eschatological perspectives in Christianity that correspond to those of the Shī'ah. It has analyzed the prophecies of the advent of Christ in the Bible and that of the Mahdi as written in Shī'ah traditions. This chapter also contrasts the birth of Jesus Christ in Bethlehem as written in the Gospels and the stories of the birth of the Mahdi as prescribed in the Shī'ah *ahadīth*. The comparison of Jesus as High Priest in NT theology has been demonstrated to evaluate the

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[153] Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism,* 161.

[154] See Al-Majlisī, *Kitāb al-Ghaibah,* 162 [Emphasis is original]. Once again, these two *ahadīth* even are not in agreement on whether the cloud or angels will accompany the Mahdi's return.

imāmate doctrine of the Shī'ah, particularly the significance of Christ's sinlessness and the Shī'ah concept of the *ma'sum* of the Mahdi. It is also necessary to prove the everlasting presence of Christ following His ascension to heaven and use it to analyze the occultation of the Twelfth Imām. Finally, this chapter has contrasted the *parousia* of Jesus Christ with the *qiyām* of the Mahdi. The evidences gathered in this chapter will serve as the basis for the conclusion discussed in chapter five.

Chapter 5

CONCLUSION

The first four chapters of this dissertation provide discussions and arguments pertaining to the most important issue in Christian and Shī'ah theology: the expectations for their messiahs, namely Jesus Christ and the Mahdi, in the millennial eschatology. The importance of this topic has been explained to provide a better understanding to Christians as to its relevance in discussions with and regarding Shī'ah Muslims. Definitions of terms mostly used in Christian theology such as "messiah," "savior," and "millennium," have been discussed in regard to Shī'ah eschatology because of their occurrences in Shī'ah writings.

Chapter two delivers the background of early Islamic history and highlights the encounter between Muhammad and the Christians, particularly with the Nestorians. This chapter observes that Muhammad received his understanding of the person of Christ from heretical groups within early Christianity. In order to help the readers understand the fundamental issue between Sunni and Shī'ah, this chapter elaborates the early dissention between the two main branches of Islam. Chapter two also provides a brief history of the twelve imāms of Shī'ah and their expectation of the return of the Mahdi from his occultation.

Chapter three explores the consistencies of the prophecy and the expectation of the *parousia* of Jesus Christ in Christian eschatology. It commences by examining the continuity of the OT prophecies pertaining to the Messiah and the fulfillment in the person and teaching of Christ in the NT. This continuity has also been demonstrated by

tracing the history of the writings of the selected church fathers and a number of contemporary premillennial theologians.

Chapter four compares the teaching of Jesus in the NT to the Mahdi in the Shī'ah Scriptures. It begins by examining the reliability of the prophecies and the narratives of their births. The evaluation on the Shī'ah concept of imāmate and the High Priesthood of Jesus along with the doctrine of the sinlessness of Christ and the *ma'sum* of the Mahdi has also been provided. Chapter four concludes by contrasting the *parousia* of Jesus Christ with the *qiyām* of the Mahdi.

Chapter five concludes this dissertation by freshly contrast messianic expectations in both Christianity and Shī'ah Islam. It begins by reviewing the similarities and differences between the two doctrines from a perspective that uses biblical teaching as its foundation. Second, it retraces the arguments beginning in chapter four to present discussion on Shī'ah eschatology, with special reference to the discussion of the Mahdi. Finally, this chapter suggests areas for further studies in regard to Christian–Shī'ah dialogue.

Comparison Summary

A comparative study in theology between two religions will result in both similarities and differences, the fundamental issue being how significant these are to the central beliefs of each religion. In this study, the main and most important difference relates to the person in whom the two beliefs put their faith. While Shī'ah believe that the Mahdi will be the messiah who will come and restore the true teaching of Islam, Christians have a firm conviction that Jesus Christ is the awaited messiah. This dissertation does not focused on the similarities, nonetheless observing some of them will aid in understanding their differences.

Similarities between Christianity and Shī'ah

Seyyed Hosein Nasr lists these similarities when addressing the topic of dialogue between the two religions in *A Common Word: Muslims and Christians on Loving God and Neighbor*.[1] According to Nasr, "the list of similarities that bind us on the basis of these basic doctrines and that bring Christians and Muslims close together are too many to enumerate."[2] Nasr's similarities notably include "eschatological realities."[3] Through a study of the writings of evangelical scholars and Shī'ah theologians, three similarities reveal themselves as part of these realities.

The perseverance in the face persecution is the first similarity between Christianity and Shī'ah; the former faced persecutions from the Romans and their own countrymen, while the latter faced persecutions from the Sunni. The word of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew obviously a call to be ready for persecution when a follower of Jesus is asked to "deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it" (Matt 16:24–25). This is echoed by Paul in his exhortation to Timothy in 2 Timothy

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[1] Miroslav Volf, Ghazi bin Muhammad, and Melissa Yarrington, eds. *A Common Word: Muslims and Christians on Loving God and Neighbor* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010). A good reminder came from George W. Braswell, Jr., when addressing some similarities of events and stories between the Bible and the Qur'ān. Braswell emphasizes that although there are similarities, "the overall interpretations given to them by Christians and Muslims differ." See George W. Braswell, Jr., *Islam: Its Prophet, Peoples, Politics, and Power* (Nashville: B&H Academics, 1996), 278–79.

[2] Seyyed Hosein Nasr, "The Word of God: The Bridge Between Him, You, and Us," in *A Common Word: Muslims and Christians on Loving God and Neighbor* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 112.

[3] Ibid., 114.

3:12 for Christ's followers to be ready to suffer persecution. Concerning the motif of suffering in Christian eschatology, Brian Daley explains,

> "It was their eschatological hope that enabled them to face these threats not only with equanimity, but with the assurance of life and happiness in a world without an end, and with a conviction of God's unfailing providence and readiness to judge human action."[4]

Similar to Daley's observation, Stephen Presley believes that the doctrine of the future in the early church fathers "is forged in the face of persecution and theological disputes with various heretical sects."[5] It is undoubtedly the eschatological hope of the return of Christ that enabled the early Christians to survive the persecution. Throughout centuries persecuted Christians around the world have also proven that their faith in Jesus Christ alone and the expectation of his *parousia* has helped them to face oppression.[6]

Within Shī'ah Islam, on the other hand, there is a belief that to become part of the *Ahlul al-bayt,* or people of the house, means to be ready for martyrdom. As Scarcia Amoretti explains that the primary meaning of *mazlūm* is "to put something in a place which is not its own."[7] Early Shī'ah history is— without a doubt—filled with persecution. Most Shī'ah writers, according to Moojan Momen, consider that all of the

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[4] Brian Daley, "Eschatology in the Early Church Fathers," in *Oxford Handbook of Eschatology*, ed. Jerry Walls (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 91.

[5] Stephen O. Presley, "The Doctrine of the Future in the Apostolic Fathers, Justin Martyr, and Irenaeus of Lyons," in *Eschatology: Biblical, Historical and Practical Approaches* (Grand Rapids, Kregel, 2016), 279.

[6] Stanley D. Toussaint, "The Doctrine of the Future and the Concept of Hope," in *Eschatology: Biblical, Historical and Practical Approaches* (Grand Rapids, Kregel, 2016), 66.

[7] B. Scarcia Amoretti, "*mazlūm,*" in *EI2.*

imāms died as martyrs.[8] The same happened with the twelve disciples of Jesus Christ. Out of the twelve, only John the apostle died of old age while the rest were murdered. Therefore, on the theme of persecution, the two faiths are similar.

The second similarity between the Shī'ah and premillennial Christian eschatology concerns the degradation of this world. Premillennial theology believes that the world will continue to decline socially, morally, and spiritually before the end of the world. Shī'ah eschatology likewise affirms a world in decline. Since the time of the twelve imāms until present, the Shī'ah continue to hold that the world will degrade and that is why the Mahdi will come to restore justice and purify the teaching of Islam.[9]

The hope for returning messiahs is a third similarity between the two faiths. The first four chapters have clearly presented the yearning for Christ's and the Mahdi's return. Non-Shī'ah readers should accept that the Shī'ah expectation of the return of the Mahdi is rooted in their genuine affection and veneration towards Prophet Muhammad and his family. The desire to see the progeny of their beloved Prophet to rule mightily, just as Muhammad did in the past, has driven their theology to anticipate a golden era led by the Mahdi to purify the true Islamic teaching as taught by Muhammad. This true Islamic teaching will result in unfathomable prosperity, peace, and justice which the world has never seen before. However, the longing of being ruled by the Prophet's family has affected their understanding and interpretation of the Qur'ān. As discussed before, Shī'ah theologians have interpreted qur'ānic verses pertaining to the doctrine of the

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[8] Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam*, 23.

[9] Abdulaziz Abdulhussein Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism: The Idea of the Mahdi in Twelver Shi'ism* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1981), 1–2.

Mahdi based on their eschatological expectations. The followers of Jesus Christ have demonstrated their blessed hope of Christ's return since the first century. This eschatological hope has been faithfully handed from the early church to the twenty-first century church. These three similarities should open the door for interfaith academic discussions between Christian and Shī'ah theologians.

Challenges in Shī'ah Eschatology

The Shī'ah face an issue when comparing their expectations of the coming of the Mahdi with the eschatological hope of Christ's return. Shī'ah's teaching that the Mahdi will be the "savior" filling the world with peace and justice is difficult to comprehend since there are no historical accounts of the Mahdi demonstrating his great power during his lifetime. Although *al-Kāfī* included traditions that allegedly contain the teachings of the Twelve Imāms, these traditions have been transmitted through four deputies and thus the reliability of these accounts is questioned. While Shī'ah historians provide numerous accounts of the teachings and traditions of previous imāms, they have presented no evidence of the act or teachings of the Twelfth Imām during his lifetime that would qualify him to be the messiah of the world. An argument can be made that it is problematic for one to put his eschatological hope on someone who has presented no such evidence during his lifetime. Particularly if this person, i.e. the Mahdi, was incapable of facing oppression from the Àbbasids. Sachedina's elaboration on the needs of *ghayba* due to the "intolerable 'Abbasids persecutions of the 'Alid Imāms during Samarra period" is the evidence that the Twelfth Imām was powerless against the ruler.[10] While the same thing could be said about the death of Jesus Christ on the cross, His

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[10] Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism*, 78.

resurrection is the evidence that Jesus was not powerless against the Jews and the Romans.

The eschatological hope of Christ's return as the messiah, on the other hand, is grounded on the miraculous acts and teachings of Jesus concerning His promise to return. His powerful act in feeding five thousand people opens the eyes of the Jews who were longing to have a king. Peter's confession in Caesarea Philippi also proves that the disciple has gained a better understanding on the messiahship of his teacher. This is also affirmed when the three disciples witness the appearance of Moses and Elijah on the mount of transfiguration. Jesus' post resurrection appearances to many people demonstrate His power over death. Therefore, the blessed hope of *parousia* is grounded on a solid biblical evidence and His promise to return. Since Chapter 4 has demonstrated that the reference about the Mahdi in the Qur'ān is lacking, hence, the doctrine of the Mahdi is not substantiated by the Qur'ān.

Terminological Issue. As mentioned in the first chapter, some terminological issues surface when prominent Shī'ah writers such as Sachedina, Dabashi, and Arjomand utilize terms that are more usually employed in Christian theology, such as "messiah" or "messianic expectation," "redemption," or even "incarnation." Although a term such as "messiah" exists in the Qur'ān, it is questionable as to how well this is known by the ordinary Shī'ah believer with the result that Shī'ah contemporary writers have no other options than to use terminologies that appear foreign to their own constituents but recognizable to Western readers. Their purpose seems to be to get the English-speaking readers acquainted with the concepts of the Mahdi. This aligns with Smith's and Haddad's explanation that it is difficult for Western observers "to get a clear overview of

all the component elements making up the Islamic eschatological picture."[11] However, using David Allen's words, they are "[making] use of the same vocabulary but [employing] a different dictionary."[12]

As for the reference to Christ's crucifixion that frequently appears in Shī'ah writings, one would have difficulty trying to determine whether the Shī'ah accept the crucifixion of Jesus or reject it. It is imperative to understand that apart from their high dependence on *hadīth*, the Qur'ān is still superior. Hence, accepting the truth of crucifixion means denying the teaching of the Qur'ān, which is impossible for any Shī'ah. On the other hand, there is a need to elaborate the horror and suffering of Husayn and his followers in Karbala with a concept that is familiar to Western readers. The crucifixion of Jesus Christ at Golgotha is the only event in human history which can be employed to depict the agony in Karbala. In sum, Shī'ah writers use the crucifixion of Jesus to magnify the event of Karbala, although they actually deny the death of Christ on the cross.

The Reliability of the Bible and the Qur'ān. Critiquing the reliabilities of the Bible and the Qur'ān without offending both Christians and Muslims is undeniably a difficult task. Nevertheless, in academic documents such as this dissertation, an objective perspective must be intelligently treated and respectably addressed. As an evangelical Christian, I am convinced of the plenary, verbal inspiration of the sixty-six books in the Bible. Despite my disagreement with most teachings in the Qur'ān, through the journey

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[11] Jane Idleman Smith and Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, *The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), xi.

[12] David Allen, *The Extent of Atonement*, xxi.

of writing this dissertation, I have developed respect towards the book Muslims hold sacred. The perspective and observation of this dissertation towards the Qur'ān should not be perceived as an act of blaspheming Islam's holy book.

The reliability of the two Scriptures must be examined based on the fulfillment of the prophecies mentioned. Numerous biblical prophecies in the OT have been fulfilled in the NT and a significant one is the prophecy pertaining to the advent of the messiah in His incarnation. The infancy narratives in Matthew 1 and Luke 2 demonstrate the reliability of OT prophecies. The prophecy of the suffering messiah in Isaiah 52:13–53:12 was fulfilled when Jesus Christ was crucified on the cross. Jesus' prophecy in the Olivet Discourse regarding the destruction of the Jerusalem temple was fulfilled when the Romans sacked Jerusalem in 70 AD. All of these passages demonstrate that the Bible is the most reliable source for the life and teaching of Jesus Christ.

Sachedina and Ayoub present an interesting observation concerning the reliability of both sacred texts, particularly when it comes to the topic of Christ and the Mahdi. Sachedina admits that other religions have influenced the Shī'ah concept of the Mahdi. He explains, "The Imāmites had worked out their own traditions, in which many ideas and beliefs concerning other messianic figures from other religions passed through various channels into their traditions."[13] Ayoub himself also admits the inadequacy of the Qur'ān in providing an accurate picture of Christ when he states, "We wish to argue, however, that the Qur'ān alone is not a sufficient source for the understanding of Christ

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[13] Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism*, 151.

in Islam."[14] Therefore, claiming the qur'ānic Christ as more reliable than the biblical Christ is an insurmountable logical flaw.

There is a unifying message when it comes to verification of Jesus as the Messiah from NT writings as understood by the Early Fathers and later developed by evangelical theologians and presented in Chapter 3. However, it is difficult to find a unifying theme about the person of the Mahdi and his *qiyām* from the Qur'ān, the *hadīth*, and later on by modern Shī'ah writers. The main factor in these differences involves divine inspiration claimed by each faith in the process of conveying their theology to adherents. The NT bears witness that it is the Holy Spirit who inspired the human writers to deliver the message of God, the incarnation in Jesus' first advent, and the glorious hope of His *parousia*. While all Muslims accept the role of Gabriel in delivering the Qur'ān to Muhammad, such is not the case with the writings of the Shī'ah *ahadīth*. Instead, Shī'ah traditions fully depend on the teachings of the twelve imāms

The Ambiguity of the Divine Source. While the early Christians conveyed their conviction of Jesus as the Messiah to later generations of Christianity, this is not the case with the early Shī'ah. As discussed previously, it took centuries for the Shī'ah to formulate and develop the theology of the Mahdi. Once the doctrine of the Mahdi developed, the next problem was transmitting it to the Shī'ah community who, at the time, struggled with acknowledging their leadership due to persecution and the doctrine of *ghaybah*. For this reason, Shī'ah scholars admit that the topic of the Mahdi is a confusing one. Sachedina on numerous occasions deliberately uses the word "confusion"

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[14] Mahmoud Ayoub, "Towards An Islamic Christology: An Image Of Jesus In Early Shi'i Muslim Literature," in *Muslim World* LXVI (1976), 163.

to explain aspects of Shī'ah eschatology. For example, Sachedina asserts that role of the Mahdi and that of Jesus "at times became confusingly alike."[15] Sachedina also admits that there is "no consensus" among the Shī'ah traditions concerning the length of the Mahdi's rule.[16] When describing the distinction between *raj'a* and *zuhūr*, Sachedina once again acknowledges that there is a "difficulty of disentangling confusing reports" on these two doctrines.[17] Similarly, Mahmoud Ayoub recognizes the complexity of Shī'ah literature that deal with the Mahdi's birth, concealment, and his return.[18] Another sincere statement comes from Mojan Momen when he opens the discussion of the occultation by asserting that, "perhaps no aspect of the history of Shi'i Islam is as confused as the stories relating to the Twelfth Imām."[19] These statements clearly display the uncertainty of Shī'ah scholars amidst their hope and expectation of the return of their alleged messiah.

Such confusions or uncertainties cannot be found in the teachings of the NT and the writings of the early church fathers as demonstrated in chapter three. The early faith and convictions of the early Christians were handed down through centuries of faithful Christian teaching. If, as Christians believe, the Bible is the Word of God and therefore trustworthy, Premillennial theologians are able to build a strong case for the hope and expectation of the *parousia* of Jesus Christ.

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[15] Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism,* 172.

[16] Ibid., 176.

[17] Ibid., 178.

[18] Mahmoud Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering*, 217.

[19] Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam,* 161.

The Divine Nature of Jesus and the Mahdi. Another observation for comparative theology such as this is to understand the recognition of the divine nature of Jesus Christ by the Shī'ah. Once again, in their effort to prove the preeminence of the imāms, Shī'ah theologians have chosen to refer to the biblical teachings about Jesus. For example, on Jesus' ability to perform miracles, the Shī'ah agree that Jesus raised people from the dead, healed people of their infirmities, and walked on water, and refer to these as miracles performed by Jesus.[20] Shī'ah *hadīth* includes the miracles of the Mahdi's birth and his allegedly miraculous power during his lifetime. However, their reference on Jesus' divinity is more an effort to demonstrate the quality and nature of the imāms by comparison without wanting to admit Jesus' divine nature.

Another problematic issue in the expectation of the Mahdi in Shī'ah theology is the veneration and exaltation of the imāms. As presented in the previous chapter, Shī'ah doctrine of the imāmate clearly demonstrates the exaltation of the imāms to the point of deifying the imāms. Arjomand's arguments on the pre-existence, existence, and super-existence of the imāms are proofs of equating the twelve imāms to divine beings. This contradicts with the qu'rānic verse on *shirk*. This is also inconsistent with Shī'ah's own *hadīth* as written in *Al-Kāfi*: "No one deserves to be worshipped except Allah', Allah, the Most Majestic, the Most Holy, who has no equal and no one shares Him in any issue."[21]

Shī'ah claims that the coming of the Mahdi prophesied in Surah 43:61 is arguably without support, even from the major qur'ānic commentators. The reference to the Mahdi cannot be found anywhere in their description of the events. Furthermore, there is lack of

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[20] Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide*, 94.

[21] Al-Kulaynī, *Al-Kāfi*, H. 2345, Ch 36, h1.

support for Shī'ah eschatological teaching concerning the Mahdi in Sūrahs that vividly describe the *qiyāma*. Therefore, this dissertation has demonstrated that the teaching of the *zuhur* of the Mahdi as claimed by the Shī'ah is actually in contradiction with the teaching of the Qur'ān, while the doctrine of the *parousia* of Christ is definitely grounded in the Bible.

Political Implication of Messianic Expectation

The expectation of the coming of Christ in Christian eschatology has no major impact in the political arena of Christians or even countries where Christians are the majority. The dialogue between Jesus and his disciples prior to His ascension has established Christ's political boundaries to his disciples when they asked about the time and season of His return. In the disciples' mind, Christ's reign on earth would be similar to or even more glorious than that of David (Matt 24:3; Acts 1:6).

Shī'ah eschatological hope, on the other hand, carries a significant political ideology even from the birth of the religion. As Timothy Furnish explains,

> "The political implications of the whole millennial idea in Islam are very difficult to separate from the eschatological ones. The hope of something better to come has informed both theology and sociopolitical expectations, and the translation of the promise of a time of universal peace and justice is easily made from this age to the next (and back again)."[22]

Article 5 of the Iranian Constitution, as aforementioned in Chapter 2, is clear evidence that the Mahdi's return has influenced political and religious leadership. Khomeini, Ahmadinejad, and Rouhani consistently included the expectation of the Mahdi in their speeches and political agendas.

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[22] Timothy Furnish, "Islam" in *Encyclopedia of Millennialism and Millennial Movements* (New York: Routledge, 200) 182.

Another example of the Mahdi's political association can be found in the sermon of a Shī'ah preacher, Mawlana Zaki Baqri, who convincingly claims that the power of the Mahdi will be more powerful than America's present political power.[23] Iran's ambitious nuclear program demonstrates how Shī'ah majority countries would incorporate their political ideology and military power with the religious belief in the expectation of the Mahdi's return from the occultation.[24]

Areas for Further Research

The research journey of this dissertation has shown that Christian interaction with Shī'ah theology, particularly on the person of Christ and his *parousia*, is still lacking. The vast growth of both Sunni and Shī'ah Islam adherents in the world in general and in North America in particular should alert evangelical Christians to study Shī'ah theology seriously. An accurate understanding of Shī'ah historical doctrine and its implication on political ideology would help evangelicals to determine proper strategy for dialogue and evangelism. Consideration of the findings in this dissertation could also generate an interest and desire among Christian theologians and missiologists to conduct research on Shī'ah literature and produce articles and dissertations that would benefit academic interaction and religious dialogue between Christians and Shī'ah.

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[23] Toby Howarth, "Karbala and Cross: Christian–Muslim Relations From the Perspective of Indian Shi'ite Preaching" in *A Faithful Presence: Essays for Kenneth Cragg* (London: Fox Communication and Publications, 2003), 315.

[24] Jean-Pierre Filiu, *Apocalypse in Islam* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011), 153–58. See also Joel Rosenberg, "Islamic Extremists Are Trying to Hasten the Coming of the Mahdi," accessed on August 1, 2018; available from https://www.nationalreview.com/2015/09/radical-islam-iran-isis-apocalytpic-messiah-mahdi/; Internet.

Christian theologians should consider some areas in this comparative theology for further research. In the area of Christology, a comparison of the doctrine of the High Priesthood of Christ and the Imāmate in Shī'ah is one topic that can be further discussed. Shī'ah writers have written a number of books and articles pertaining the uniqueness of the imām in their theology. As for the area of bibliology, one could conduct a comparative study on the inerrancy of the Bible and the *nass,* or inimitability, of the Qur'ān from Shī'ah perspective. For theologians whose expertise in ecclesiology would be interested in comparing the community aspect of *Ahlul al-bayt* and the life of the early church. In sum, there are still vast areas of academic research in Christian–Shī'ah relations that can be beneficial for the two religions.

Closing Remarks

The Shī'ah expectation of the return of the Mahdi is mostly grounded in their *hadīth* and their interpretations of a few verses in the Qur'ān. Shī'ah theology describes the powerful role of the Mahdi in his return and the subordinate role of Jesus as his assistant. It means that the Mahdi will be more powerful than Jesus and to whom Jesus will submit. Although this is the belief of the second largest branch of Islam in the world, this dissertation calls into question the consistencies of this claim within the Qur'ān. The description of the imāmate in Shī'ah theology clearly elevates the twelve imāms as those who possess divine nature. Although the deity of the Mahdi is explicit in the writings of Shī'ah writers, none of them have come up with a definite statement about the Mahdi's divinity due to the fear of committing the sin of *shirk.*

On the other hand, through the writings of various premillennial theologians, this dissertation has shown that the *parousia* of Jesus Christ is consistent in its presentation from the NT teaching. The premillennialists referenced in this dissertation

have also argued that there is a continuity between their teaching and the doctrine of the church fathers. The doctrine of the return of Jesus Christ as the messiah in premillennial theology is not in contradiction with eschatological passages in the Gospels, Pauline epistles, and the book of Revelation.

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